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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# WITHIN THE PRECINCTS

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD," ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1879.

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# WITHIN THE PRECINCTS.

## CHAPTER I.

### ST. MICHAEL'S.

THE Abbey Church of St. Michael's stands on a low hill in a flat and fertile country. The holy places which are sacred to the great archangel seem to settle naturally upon a mount; and this, one of the noblest structures consecrated under his name, had all the effect of a very high elevation—so wide-spreading was the landscape round, so vast the sweep of plain, fields, and woods, great parks and commons, and gleaming white villages like ships at sea, which could be seen from its walls and terraces. Though the settlement was ecclesiastical, the place had been walled and defensible in the days when danger threatened wealth whatever form it assumed. Danger, however, had long been far from the thoughts of the dignified corporation which held its reverend court upon the hill. The Abbey was as splendid as any cathedral, and possessed a dean and chapter, though no bishop. It was of Late Gothic, *perpendicular and magnificent*; and the walls *and towers which still surrounded* it, and even the old

houses within the precincts, were older still than the Abbey, and could have furnished many "bits" to make the heart of a mediæval architect glad. The very turf which filled the quadrangle and clothed the slope of the Dean's Walk was a production of centuries; the Chapter House was full of historical documents, and the library of rare books; and there were antiquarian fanatics who protested that the wealthy livings belonging to the Abbey, and its old endowments, were the least of its riches. Nor was this establishment on the hill confined to ecclesiastical interests only. The beautiful church was the chapel of an order of knighthood, and opposite to it—forming an integral part of the pile of buildings—was a line of small ancient houses, forming a kind of screen and inner wall of defence to the sacred citadel, which were the lodges of a supplementary order of pensioners—Chevaliers of St. Michael—which at the time of the foundation had given such a balance, as the Middle Ages loved, of Christian charity and help, to the splendour and braggadocio of the more glorious knights. Thus the little community which inhabited this noble old pile of buildings was varied and composite. The highest official in it was the costly and aristocratic Dean, the lowest the lay clerks, who were housed humbly in the shadow of the church in a little cloister of their own, and who daily filled the Abbey with the noblest music. The Deanery was close to the Abbey, and embraced

in its irregular group of roofs the great tower, which showed for miles round, with its lighted windows, rising up into the night. The canons' houses, if not equally fine, were still great old houses, standing on the edge of the hill, their walls rising straight from the green slopes dotted with trees, round the foot of which a little red-roofed town had gathered; and the Abbey itself stood between those stately habitations and the humbler lodges of the Chevaliers, which shut off the lower level of sloping bank on the other side. The Dean himself was of a great family, and belonged not only to the nobility, but, higher still, to the most select circles of fashion, and had a noble wife and such a position in society as many a bishop envied; and among his canons were men not only of family, but possessed of some mild links of connection with the worlds of learning and scholarship,—even it was said that one had writ a book in days when books were not so common. The minor canons were of humbler degree; they formed the link between gods and men, so to speak—between the Olympus of the Chapter and the common secular sphere below. We will not deceive the reader nor buoy him up with hopes that this history concerns the lofty fortunes of the members of that sacred and superior class. To no such distinction can these humble pages aspire; our office is of a lowlier kind. On Olympus the doings are all splendid, if not, as old chronicles *tell*, much wiser than beneath,

amid the humbler haunts of men. All that we can do is to tell how these higher circles looked, to eyes gazing keenly upon them from the mullioned windows which gave a subdued light to the little rooms of the Chevaliers' lodges on the southern side of St. Michael's Hill.

These lodges were two storeys in height, with small rooms and very solid masonry, little gardens in front of them, and a tower at each end. Many creeping plants clung about the old walls, and especially there were clouds of Virginia creeper which made them glorious in autumn. It was, howerer, on a summer afternoon, at the time this history begins, that Lottie Despard—the only daughter of Captain Despard, a Chevalier not very long appointed to that office—sat, with her head out through the open window, framed between the mullions, watching the broad slope of the Dean's Walk which lay between her and the church, and led to the Deanery and the heights beyond. The Deanery was at this moment the most important place in the world, not only to Lottie, but to many other spectators who thronged the slope beneath her window. For this day a great event had happened in St. Michael's. The Dean's only daughter, Augusta Huntington, had been married that morning with all the pomp imaginable. It had been like a royal wedding, sumptuous in ritual, in music, and fine company; and now, after taking a little repose during the time which the wed-

ding-party spent at breakfast, the Abbey precincts were beginning to fill again with gazing groups, and all the people within were coming to their windows to see the bride and bridegroom go away.

Lottie Despard was beyond all comparison the prettiest, and she was also the youngest, of all the ladies in the lodges. She was of Irish descent, and she had the whiteness of skin, the blackness of abundant hair, the deep blue eyes that so often go with Milesian blood. Such eyelashes had never been seen at St. Michael's; indeed, they had never been seen anywhere "out of Mrs. Jarley's waxworks!" some ill-natured critics said. Sometimes, when Lottie was specially pale or weary, they seemed to overshadow her face; but she was neither weary nor pale at this particular moment. She was in great excitement, on the contrary, and flushed with expectation. Though she was only the daughter of a poor Chevalier, Lottie had advantages which separated her from the rest of that little company. Her father was of good family, a point on which she insisted strenuously; and she herself was the possessor of a beautiful voice. The former particular would not have been of much advantage to her, for what was the Despards' old and faded quality to the great people at St. Michael's? But a voice is a different matter; and there had arisen between Miss Huntington and the Chevalier's daughter a kind of intimacy very flattering (the neighbours thought) to

Lottie. They had sung together so much and seen so much of each other, that the lodges expected nothing less than that Lottie would have been asked to the wedding, or even—greater honour still!—to be a bridesmaid; and Lottie herself had been wounded and disappointed beyond measure when she found herself left entirely out. But there was still the possibility that the bride might show she had not forgotten her humble friend altogether; and it was for this that Lottie was waiting so anxiously as the time of departure approached. A word, a sign, a wave of the hand surely would be vouchsafed to her as the carriage passed. Her heart was beating loudly as she leant out—a pretty sight to see from without, for the window was framed in luxuriant wreaths of green, with trailing tendrils of the young delicate leaves which in autumn flamed like scarlet flowers against the wall. The people who were gathering on the road below gave many a look at her. And, though the young ladies from the shops, who had got half-an-hour's leave to see how their handiwork looked in the bride's travelling-dress, were deeply sensible of the fact that a poor Chevalier's daughter was not much richer than themselves, yet they could not help looking and envying Lottie, if only for the window at which she could sit in comfort and see everything that went on, instead of standing in the sun as they had to do. They forgot her, however, and everything else as the carriage drove up to the Deanery to take

the bridal pair away. The Dean's daughter was so much the princess of the community that a compromise had been made between popularity and decorum; and it was in a carriage partially open, that an admiring people might behold her as she passed, that she was to drive away. There was the usual long waiting at the door while the farewells were made, during which time the outside world looked on respectfully; and then, with a crowd of "good-byes" thrown after her, and a few—but only a very few, for the Deanery was nothing if not decorous—white satin slippers, and a prance and dash of the impatient horses, and a flourish of the coachman's whip, and a parting gleam of the wedding favour on his breast, the bridal pair rolled rapidly past, and all was over. How quickly they went, everybody said, and how well she looked; and how well that brown dress looked, though it had been thought rather dowdy for such an occasion; and the feather in the hat, how well it matched, about which there had been so much trouble! Some, who had the time, paused to see the wedding guests disperse, and catch other beatific glimpses of fine bonnets and gay dresses; but most of the spectators, after this last and crowning point of the performance, streamed down the slope and out at the great gateway, and were seen no more.

Lottie drew in her head from the window the moment the carriage passed. She grew red when other people grew pale, being pale by nature; and her face

was crimson as she withdrew it from the opening, and came in again to the little room in which most of her life was spent. Her lips were closed very tight, her soft forehead contracted; the fire in her blue eyes, gleaming with anger and disappointment, was (most unwillingly) quenched in tears. She clasped her hands together with a vehement clasp. "It would have cost so little to give a look!" she cried; then bit her lips and clenched her hands and stamped her foot upon the floor, in a forlorn but vigorous effort to restrain her tears.

"What does it matter to you?" said a tall young fellow, sufficiently like Lottie to prove himself her brother, who had looked out lazily over her head while the carriage was passing. He had his hands in his pockets and a slouching gait generally, and looked too big for the little room. She had almost pushed against him in her rapid movement, for his movements were never rapid; and he had not had time to take one hand out of his pocket before she flashed round upon him with two red spots on her cheeks and fury in her heart.

"What does it matter? Oh, nothing! nothing!" cried Lottie. "Why should anything matter? It only shows me a little more, a very little more, how cold the world is, and that nobody has a heart!"

"Few people have very much, I suppose," said the young man; "at least, so the governor says. But what good or harm could it do you to have a parting sign

from *her*? I knew she would never give it you. I knew she would be thinking of nobody but herself——"

"What did you know about it?" cried the girl. "You were never a friend of hers! you were never begged and prayed to go and sing at the Deanery! she never came down the Abbey Hill to look for you! But me she has done all that for; and when I thought just for once she would let everybody see that Lottie Despard was a friend — Oh, Law, for the love of Heaven, go and work at something, and don't stand there staring at me!"

"What am I to work at?" said the young man, with a yawn. "It's past working hours; besides, in summer how can anyone work? I can't make head nor tail of that Euclid when the sun is shining."

"But when the sun is not shining, Law?"

"Oh! then," said the youth, with a smile breaking over his somewhat cloudy face, "I can make out the head, but not the tail, and the sting is in the tail, you know! Good-bye, Lottie, and never mind any mother's daughter of them. They cannot make us anything but what we are, whatever they may do."

"And what are we?" said Lottie to herself, as her brother strolled lazily out. There was more air to breathe when he was gone, which was something. She sat down upon the little old faded sofa, and shed a few more bitter tears of disappointment and mortification. We all like to think well of ourselves when that

is possible; to think well of our belongings, our people, our position in the world—all that makes up that external idea of us which we make acquaintance with years before we know our own real being. No one can tell what the atmosphere of well-being, of external credit, and public esteem is to a child; and this Lottie had never known. They had been poor, but poverty is no hindrance to that feeling of harmony with the world around which is the higher soul of respectability. But there had not been much about the Despards to respect. The father had been a good officer in his day, and, if he had not been without money and interest, and everything that could help him on, might have been distinguished in his profession. But those were the days of "purchase," and Captain Despard had remained Captain Despard, and had bitterly resented the fact. His wife, too, though she was Lottie's mother, had not been of a kind to reclaim for her husband the failing credit of his life. They had lived as most poor officers on half pay, with pretensions to gentility and hankerings after pleasure, do live. They were in debt all round, as need not be said; and Mrs. Despard's life would have been rendered miserable by it if she had not escaped from the contemplation by means of every cheap merry-making or possible extravagance she could attain to. All had been hugger-mugger in Lottie's early life; a life not destitute of amusements, indeed, but full of bitterness, small morti-

fications, snubs, and the cold shoulder of social contempt. Lottie herself had heard in childish quarrels, through the frank recriminations of her childish companions, the frankest statements of what other people thought of her parents; and this had opened her baby eyes prematurely to the facts of the case. It must be supposed that there was some respectable grandpapa, some precise and orderly aunt in the Despard kindred, who had given to Lottie a nature so different from that of her immediate progenitors. As she grew older everything about her had looked to Lottie as the fairy splendour looked in the eyes of the disenchanted human spectator. Her mother's gay dresses, which she once thought so pretty, came to look like the miserable finery they were; her mother's gaiety had become noise and excitement. Her father's grand air grew the poorest false pretension; for must he not know, Lottie thought, how everybody spoke of him, how little anyone thought of his assumption? And the house was miserable, dirty, disorderly, mean, and gaudy, full of riot and waste and want and poverty—one day a feast, another nothing. Even careless Law—the big boy who was too much at home, who was scarcely ever at school, and who often had no clothes to go out in —even Law saw how wretched it was at home, though he was hopeless as well as careless, and asked his sister what was the good of minding, what could they do? But Lottie was not of the kind which can let ill

alone, or well either, for that matter. She did mind; and as she grew older, every week, every day, added to the flame of impatience in her. Just, however, when ruin seemed coming beyond the possibility of further staving-off, Mrs. Despard fell ill and died; and Lottie at sixteen was left alone, miserable, with remorseful thoughts of having secretly blamed the mother who was now out of reach, and to whom she could never make amends for those injurious secret fault-findings; and full of anxieties unspeakable—forlorn wonderings what she was to do, and eagerness to do something. Her grief, however, was lightened by the feeling that now she had everything in her hands and could "make a change,"—even when it was made more heavy by the thought that she had found fault in her heart with the mother who was dead. It seemed to the girl that she must be able, by dint of devoting herself to it, to change everything—to keep the house in order if she did it with her own hands, to pay the bills, wherever the money came from. She was overflowing with life and energy and activity, and disapproved of all the ways of the past. She was like a new king coming to the throne, a new ministry of idealists bent upon undoing all their predecessors had done, and doing everything as it ought to be done. Alas, poor Lottie! the young king with all the stiff precedents of a hundred years against him, the young ministry confronted by a thousand problems, and finding their ideal pronounced

impracticable on every side, were nothing to the heaven-born reformer of the household with a pleasure loving impecunious father to whom debt was second nature, and who had always preferred fun to respectability. And she dashed at her reforms too boldly, as was natural to her age, insisting upon brushings and sweepings till Betty threw up her situation, and asking for money till her father swore at her. "It is to pay the bills, papa! I want to pay the bills!" she had said, reduced to plead for that which she thought she had a right to demand. "D—— the bills!" was all Captain Despard replied.

And even Law, when Lottie tried to order him off to school, was unmanageable. He was no reformer like his sister, but on the whole preferred going just when it suited him and lounging at home between whiles. To be sure home was less amusing now that poor mammy, as they called her, was gone. Her laughter and her complaints, and her odd visitors, and all her slipshod ways, had kept noise and movement, if nothing more, about the house. The tawdry women and the shabby men who had been her friends were all afraid of the dulness which naturally follows a death in the family. Some of these women, indeed, had come to Lottie all tears and kisses, offering to stay with her, and asking what they could do; but their sympathy did not comfort the girl, who even in her deepest grief was all *tingling* with plans and desires

to be doing, and an eager activity and impatience to make the changes she wished. But they fluttered away, every one, when the first excitement was over and the dulness that is inevitable fell upon the house. To do them justice there was not one among them who would not have come daily to "sit with" Lottie, to comfort her with all the news that was going, and tell her that she must not mope. But Lottie wanted none of their consolations, and did not miss her mother's friends when they abandoned her. She did not miss them, but Law did. Yet he would not go to school; he sat and made faces at her when she ordered and scolded him. "If I didn't do what *she* told me, do you think I will do what you tell me?" said Law; and then Lottie wept and prayed. "What will become of you, Law? what will you ever be good for? Papa has no money to leave us, and you will not be able to do anything."

"Who said I wanted to do anything?" said Law flippantly; and then, "who said I should not be able to do anything?" he added, with offence. "I can pick it up whenever I like." But Lottie, preternaturally, awfully wise, feeling the burden of the world upon her shoulders, knew that he could not pick it up when he pleased. She knew that education had to be acquired painfully, not sipped a little mouthful at a time. She had never had any education herself, but yet she knew this, as she knew so many things, by instinct, by constant critical observation of the habits which she dis-

approved. There are few more vigorously successful ways of finding out what is right, than by living among people whom we feel indignantly to be wrong.

"You may think what you like," she said, "Law—but I *know* that you cannot learn anything in that way. Three days at home and one at school! I wonder they let you go at all. I wonder they don't turn you out. I wonder they did not turn you out long ago!"

"And that is just what they are always threatening to do," said Law laughing; "but they have not the heart of a mouse, the fellows at the grammar-school. And they'll never do it, though I shouldn't mind. I should be free then, and never have to trouble my head about anything at all."

"You'll have to trouble your head when you have to work and don't know how," said Lottie. "Oh, if I was a boy! It's no use wishing, I am only a girl; and you are a great lump, neither one nor the other; but if I were only a boy, and could get something to do, and a little money to pay those bills——"

"Oh, dash the bills, as papa says. He doesn't say 'dash,'" said Law, with provoking calm; "but, then, I mustn't swear."

"Oh, Law, I should like to beat you!" said Lottie, clenching her little fists in impotent anger and setting her teeth. But Law only laughed the more.

"You had better not," he said, when he had got over his laugh, "*for I am a deal stronger than you.*"

And so he was, and so were they all, much stronger than poor Lottie; even Betty, who would not scrub, but who was too well used to all the ways of the family and aware of all their troubles, to be sent away. She fought for a time hard and bitterly, striving with all her might to clean, and to dust, and to keep things straight, to the infinite discontent of everybody concerned. But yet perhaps the girl's struggles were not utterly without use; for when the next astonishing change came in their lives, and their little income was suddenly increased by half, and a removal made necessary, Captain Despard, of his own accord, turned Lottie's despair in a moment into hope and joy. He said, "Now, Lottie, you shall have things your own way. Now you shall see what you can do. This is a new start for us all. If you can keep us respectable, by Jove, you shall, and nobody shall stop you. A man ought to be respectable when he's made a Chevalier of St. Michael." Lottie's heart leaped up, up from where it lay fathoms deep in unutterable depression and discouragement. "Oh, papa, papa, do you mean it? Will you keep your word?" she cried, happy yet dubious; and how he kept it, but with a difference, and how they set out upon this new chapter in their career, shall be told before we come back again to Lottie in her proper person, in the little drawing room in the Chevaliers' quarters within the Abbey *precincts*, on Miss Huntington's wedding-day.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CHEVALIERS' LODGES.

THE name of a Chevalier of St. Michael sounds very splendid to innocent and uninstructed ears. It is a title which stands alone in England at least. Poor Knights have been heard of both in flesh and blood and in confectionery, in other places; but the title Chevalier is preserved in St. Michael's, and there alone. Lottie thought it very imposing, and her heart leaped, partly with a sense of her own injustice all her life to her father, of whose merits, in youthful irreverence, she had hitherto thought but little. He must be, she thought involuntarily, a great deal braver, better, and altogether of more importance than she had supposed, when his qualities could win him such a distinction from his country; for that it was a distinction accorded by the country Lottie had no manner of doubt in those days. She was overawed and overjoyed: first of all on account of the people in Fairford, where they had hitherto lived, and who had shown but little respect for the family: but much more on her own account. She felt reconciled to herself, to her kind, to all her circumstances, when she reflected that

she was the daughter of a Chevalier of St. Michael, and that Betty would never leave Fairford, and that Captain Despard had expressed himself in favour of respectability as a thing to be cultivated. Life suddenly took a new aspect to her. She thought they would be able to shake off every incumbrance when they went away. Her father would henceforward live a stately and dignified life as became his position. He would not haunt the place where billiards were played, and wear a number of shabby coats, each worse than the other, but every one with a flower in it. The flower, which most people would have thought a softening clause, was intolerable to Lottie; it looked like a piece of braggadocio, a wilful defiance of public opinion or declaration of independence. But henceforward if he must wear a flower it must be at least in a tolerable coat; henceforward he would be trim and smooth, and come in at a respectable hour; henceforward there should be no bills except weekly ones, and Law should go to school—nay, Law was too old for school now—but at least he would read with a tutor, and grow into a creature of whom his sister might be proud. Perhaps this was but another way of expressing the domestic tyranny of which Lottie's will was full. She was so anxious to be able to be proud of her father and brother; was not that another way of saying that she wanted to get them up, or down, to *her* feminine standard, and control and bind and keep

them at her apron-string? So, perhaps, a cynic might have said. But Lottie was unconscious of any such intention. She was eager to have something which she had not, the opposite of what she had—and thus, too, it may be said, she fell into a commonplace.

But when the family got to St. Michael's, Lottie's hopes came to a melancholy conclusion. Not only did Captain Despard remain very much the same, which was a thing that most people anticipated—and Law decline the tutor, upon whom Lottie had set her heart, but St. Michael's itself and the Chevaliership turned out something very different from the girl's exalted expectations. She found that this office was not looked upon on the spot as a reward of distinguished merit bestowed by the country, but only as a sort of retiring pension for a number of old soldiers whose friends had interest enough to have them thus provided for. She found a hierarchy of a totally different kind constituted and reigning, in which the Chevaliers had no place. And she found herself—she whose chief inspiration was this proud and eager desire to be somebody—in a place where she could never be other than nobody, and where no nobler self-denial on the part of her father, no virtue in Law, could call forth the acclamation of the world. In Fairford there were people as poor as themselves whom all the world thought well of, and of whom Lottie was envious; but here she was one *of a class* who were poor among the

rich, and did not get the social honours which many of them deserved; while at the same time, close before her eyes, daily visible, appeared another class which seemed to fulfil all Lottie's requirements: refined people with beautiful houses, living serene in an atmosphere of universal respect. But alas, these were ecclesiastical people, not the Chevaliers: and showed little disposition to notice Lottie. Lottie did not like this. She had expected something so different. Society, she thought, and a brighter world were going to open upon her; and lo! nothing at all opened upon her that was new. It is very hard, especially when you feel yourself to be, as the proverb says, as good a gentleman as the king, to find yourself in contact with a higher class which ignores you. Most of us have to bear something of the kind, and learn to take it with philosophy. But Lottie was very young and sadly disappointed. Nobody took any notice of her save the other Chevaliers, their wives and daughters, and these were not very much more splendid people than the society she had been used to. Lottie was sore, and disappointed, and humbled in her own conceit.

And there was another way in which the word of promise was kept to her ear, with far other meaning than she had hoped. Captain Despard had a very serious interview with his daughter when they arrived *in their little* house. He called her out of the little *box which* was her drawing-room to the other little

box where he had established himself, and deigned to enter upon the question of income.

"Now, Lottie," he said, "you have chosen to bother me lately about money, and expressed views which I could not sanction about weekly bills."

"Only to save you trouble, papa," said Lottie; "if we do it every week, we may hope to keep within our income; but how can you ever do that when you leave butchers and bakers for a year?"

"My child," said Captain Despard, with his grand air, "circumstances have enabled me to yield to your wishes. I don't say if it's a system I approve or don't approve. I say to myself, Lottie is my only girl, and she is like her dear mother; she shall have her way. From this day, my dear, the new income which I receive from my country will go straight into your hands. It is but a pittance. A poor soldier stands a poor chance in these times, but such as it is, my love, it shows your father's trust in you. Take it, Lottie, and pay your bills according to your pleasure. I will ask no questions; weekly, monthly, or once a quarter, as long as I have a bit of dinner and a cup of coffee when I want it. Your father's confidence in you is perfect, Lottie, and I leave it all to you."

"Papa!" said the girl, trembling, half delighted, half frightened, half taken in by that grand air. But he would hear no more. He kissed her forehead with

the favourite action of the *père noble*, and hurried away. "No thanks, my child; no thanks," he said.

It *was* a pittance. Lottie stood where he left her gazing after him, her veins tingling with mingled disappointment and pleasure. To the inexperienced it seems always possible to do a great deal with a little, and the power of paying bills at all seemed a heavenly power. But Captain Despard chuckled to himself as he went away. He had purchased by that fine address the right to be disagreeable ever after, to wave his hand loftily, and to decline all knowledge of details. "Keep to your bargain, my dear, and I'll keep to mine," he had the right to say; and whereas some of his former income always had to be wasted upon the household, let him make what resistance he would, at least that would be the case no longer. Thus Lottie had her way, but in such a changed form that it no longer seemed her way. With the addition of the St. Michael's allowance she had hoped that there would be plenty for all needs; but what was she to do with the St. Michael's allowance and no more? Nevertheless, Lottie plucked up a heart. To feel that she had something was always exhilarating, and inexperience has wild hopes which knowledge does not venture to share. Her little room was full for a week after of little bits of paper scribbled over with calculations. She was determined to do it. If the dinner was not good enough for papa, he must just go and

dine elsewhere. And there was no Betty to make herself disagreeable, but only a young girl, whom Lottie, heaven save her! meant to train. Once a week or so. Law and she could very well do without a dinner. They were both still great on bread and butter, and capable, not knowing anything about digestion, of swallowing innumerable cups of tea. Her fond hopes of furniture and "picking up things" to make the little old house pretty, must be relinquished, it was true; but, still, at nineteen one can put up with a great deal in the present. There is always the future, so much of the future, like the sky and the plain from St. Michael's Hill, spreading above, below, everywhere, without limit or bound, save in the eyes which can only reach a certain distance. So Lottie comforted herself for "just now," and marched on into her life, colours flying and drums beating, taking as little heed as she could of those stragglers who would always fall out of the ranks—her father always shuffling off to some new haunt or other, the places which such men find out by instinct in the least-known locality, and large loose-limbed Law, whose vague career was always dubious, and who could not keep step. Never mind! Lottie herself set out, brave, head erect, eyes straight, all her faculties in fullest attention to the roll of her own cheerful drum.

The earliest part of her career here, however, was brightened yet disturbed by a discovery which consider-

ably confused her mind in her outset, and seemed to open better prospects before her. Lottie found out that she had a voice. She had known that she could sing long before, and had performed many a time in the little parlour at Fairford to the admiration of all hearers, singing every new comic song that burst upon the little provincial world from the music-halls in London, and knowing no better, so long as she was a child. There was no harm in the songs she sang, nothing but absolute silliness and flippancy, such as are natural to that kind of production; but as Lottie grew into womanhood, and began by instinct to know better, she gave them up, and knowing no others except some ancient sentimental ditties of her mother's, gave up singing so far as a musical creature can give up what is another kind of breathing to her. But when she heard the choir in the Abbey church, Lottie woke up, with such a delightful discovery of what music was, and such an ecstatic finding out of her own powers, as words cannot express. She had an old jingling worn-out piano, and had "learned to play" from her mother, who knew nothing about it, except as much as could be taught to a school-girl twenty years before; but this meagre instruction, and the bad instrument, and the half-dozen "pieces" which were all Mrs. Despard's musical library, had not attracted the pupil, and it was *not till she* heard the organ pealing through St. *Michael's,* and the choristers singing like angels—

though they were not like angels out of doors—that Lottie awoke to a real consciousness of her own gift. She had never had any education herself. Though she was so anxious for school for Law, it had not occurred to her that she wanted any schooling. Lottie was narrow-minded and practical. She did not understand self-culture. She wanted Law to learn, because without education he could not do anything worth speaking of, could not earn any money, could not get on in the world. Perhaps it is true that women have a natural inclination to calculate in this poor way. She did not care a straw for the cultivation of Law as Law —but that he should be made good for something, get a good situation, have some hopes of comfort and prosperity. For herself, what did it matter? She never could know enough to teach, and Captain Despard would not let his daughter teach; besides, she had plenty to do at home, and could not be spared. She could read and write, and do her accounts, the latter very well indeed; and she had learned to "play" from her mother, and she could sew, rather badly at first, rather well now by dint of practice. What did a girl want more? But Lottie discovered now that a girl might want more.

"Is there any place where they will teach you to sing without money?" she said one day to old Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, *her next-door neighbour, the old lady of all her neighbours whom Lottie liked best.*

"Me jewel!" cried the old lady; "is it without pa ing youre meaning? They send an account if you c but look at them here, me dear."

"All of them?" said Lottie; "for I can sing, and should like to learn to sing; but, you know, I car pay—much——"

"I know; nothing at all, if you're like us, me hone But maybe you're better off. O'Shaughnessy, we dor make a secret of it, rose from the ranks, and we' never had a penny—I don't care who knows it—ba ring our pay."

"We are not like that," said Lottie, drawing he self up. "Papa was always a gentleman" ("Then don't give much for such gentlemen," murmured tl other Chevalier's lady, under her breath), "and v have a little. That is—I mean, that he has a little- papa has a little"—the girl said on the edge of a co fidence; and then stopped suddenly short.

"It don't do much for the children, I'll go bai said the old lady. "That's the worst of fine gentl men, me dear. O'Shaughnessy he asks me for shillin' when he wants it, bless him—and that's t only way when there's small pay. Singing, is it? you're always to make such a stand on being a lad me friend Lottie, I don't see how I can help you; b if you will come in free and comfortable, and take dish of tay when Rowley's there—oh, to be sure, pu my lady's off—but there's no harm in him; and he

make you die with laughin' at him, him and his airs—but they tell me he has the best voice and the best method of any of the lay clerks."

"A singing man!"

"Well, and that was what ye wanted!" said the old woman. "You know as well as me, Miss Lottie, there's no singin' woman here."

Lottie protested that she could not consent to appear in such company—that papa would not allow it—that it was impossible. But she ended by promising to "run in" before old Major O'Shaughnessy began his rubber, and see this singing man. And the result was that, half out of friendship for his Irish hosts who did not pretend to be above him, and half out of pride to be interrogated so graciously about his invalid daughter by a young lady who gave herself such airs, Rowley, the first tenor, agreed for so low a rate as had never been heard of before to train Miss Despard's beautiful voice. "If the young lady had been a little boy, and if the Signor could but ha' gotten hold on it!" Rowley said, in enthusiasm. It was the voice, which is impersonal, of which he spoke, and the Signor was the organist. But good fortune had not as yet thrown him in Lottie's way. Soon, however, Rowley began to whisper it about that he had got a pupil who was quite good enough for Exeter Hall, if not for the Italian Opera, and the whole community was interested. Lottie herself, and her pretty

looks, had not attracted any notice—but a voice was a very different matter. And then it was that steps were taken to make, for Lottie's behalf, a practicable gap in the hedge of prickles which surrounded the Cloisters and kept intruders out. Miss Despard was invited to join the St. Michael's Choral Society, in which the Divinities on the hill did not disdain to mingle their voices even with the lower-born outside the Abbey walls. And when it became known what a voice Lottie's was, a remarkable thing happened. The Dean *called!* It was not Lady Caroline, but the Dean; and a gentleman's visit, as is well known, is not the same thing as a lady's. But Lottie, who knew nothing of the laws of society, was flattered and happy, and saw a hundred lovely visions unfolding before her when the Dean invited her to go to a private practice, which was then going on in the Deanery drawing-room. "My daughter bade me fetch you, Miss Despard, if you would be good enough to come," he said, gravely; but waited very impatiently till she was ready, in great terror lest "the father" should make his appearance, and his visit be construed into a call upon Captain Despard. Lottie put on her hat with her heart leaping and bounding. At last she had done it! At last Paradise was opening before the Peri! At last the wrongs of fate were to be set right, and herself conveyed back into her natural sphere. She went by the Dean's side demurely, with downcast eyes, across the

slope to the Deanery garden. The very stones felt elastic under her feet, there was a ringing of excitement and delight in the air and in her ears. She arrived breathless at the door, though they had not walked fast. So absorbed was she by all that was about to happen that Lottie never thought of the sensation that ran through the Abbey when the Dean was seen walking to his own dignified door in company with Captain Despard's daughter. Miss Despard? Lottie? The Chevaliers, and their wives and daughters, could not believe their eyes.

Lottie held her head as high as usual when she came back. It no longer drooped with diffidence and delight. Once more she had come down with a jar into the realms of reality from those of hope. She was not received with open arms in that higher celestial world. Miss Augusta Huntington said, "How do you do, Miss Despard?" very sweetly, but Lady Caroline only bowed with her eyelids—a new mode of salutation which Lottie did not understand—and kept aloof; and no one else said anything to Lottie, except about the music. They gave her a cup of tea when all was over, but Lottie had to drink it in silence, while the others laughed and chatted. She was not of them, though they had brought her among them for the sake of her voice. "Are you going, Miss Despard?" said the Dean's daughter, putting on the same sweet smile. "We are so much obliged to you for coming.

The next practice is next Tuesday. Will you come as early as possible, please?" It was on Lottie's lips to say "No"—to tell them that she was a lady too, a better gentlewoman than they were, since she would not have treated any stranger so. But she was fortunately too shy to say anything, and made her exit hastily, and not so gracefully as the others, who were at home. But she would not allow, even to herself, that she had come down again in that painful tussle with reality, which is so much different from dreams. She kept very quiet and said nothing, which seemed the wisest way. And as she walked home with a much more stately gravity than was her wont—a state put on to console herself for humiliation and disappointment, and to vindicate, so to speak, her own dignity to herself, but which the lookers-on gave a very different interpretation of—Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, nodding and smiling, and in a state of great excitement, threw up the window and called to her, as she was going past. "Come up, come up, and tell me all about it," the old lady said, so audibly that some of the ladies and gentlemen who had been in the Deanery turned round to look, and smiled at each other, making Lottie furious. As she could not stand there and explain before all the world, Lottie obeyed the call, and rushing upstairs to the kind old Irishwoman's little bit of a drawing-room, appeared, crimson with shame and wrath at the door.

"How could you call out so loud and make them laugh?" she said, with a strong inclination to burst into hot tears.

"Laugh, was it? and sure I'm ready to laugh too. To see you and his Reverence the Dean, Miss Lottie —no less would serve you!—arm in arm like a pair of young——"

"We were not arm in arm," said Lottie, stamping her foot. Then she had the sense to perceive that the wicked old Irishwoman would but laugh the more at her petulance. She put her music on the table with a recovery of her dignified manners, and sat down.

"What did he say to ye? and what did me Lady Caroline say to ye? and were they all wild over yer beautiful voice, me honey?" said the old lady. "Come, take off your hat, me pet, and ye shall have the best cup o' tea in the Abbey. And tell me all about it," she said.

"I have had a cup of tea, thank you," said Lottie. "Oh, yes, they are all nice enough. Nobody talked to me—but then, I didn't expect them to talk to me. They wanted me to sing—and I sang; and that was all."

"And what more would you have, me jewel?" said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. "Now, you take my advice, Lottie. I'm old, and I know the world. Take what you can get, me dear, and wait till your time comes. Don't go and take *offence* and throw up the cards,

and lose all you've got for a tantrum. Tantrums pass off, but life goes on. If they don't speak to you, it's their loss, for you have a clever little tongue o' your own. And you'll not be long there till they find out that. Don't say a word, me honey. I'll not bother you; but never take offence with the gentry——"

"The gentry!" cried the girl furious, starting to her feet. "I am as much a lady as any of them—and more, for I would not be such——I would not be unkind——"

"Well—well—well! There, I have put my foot in it!" said the old lady. "I was thinking of meself, me dear, as if ye were a girl of my own. But you *are* a lady, honey; one has but to look at you," said the astute old woman; "and just you wait a bit, and all will come as it ought—sure, I know it will."

Lottie did not much trust the assurance, but she took the advice, feeling a quick admonition within herself as to the absurdity of her complaint, and the horrible possibility of anybody supposing that she felt herself not to be of the gentry, as good as any Dean's daughter. So she went to the next practice, taking no notice of any want of courtesy: and the result was that there arose a kind of intimacy, as has been indicated, between Miss Huntington at the Deanery and the daughter of the Chevalier—an intimacy, indeed, of a *peculiar kind,* in which all that was given came from *the side of the* poorer and more insignificant, and the

great young lady was content with taking all that poor Lottie was so willing to give. She sang the solos in their private little concerts, and though her science was less perfect than her voice, her ear was so good that Lottie was able to be of a great deal of use. They sent for her when they had parties, when there was anyone who wanted entertaining, and put Lottie to the only unnecessary personal expense she had ever gone into—a white muslin frock to make her presentable among that fine company. And thus she had gone and come, and had been called upon on all occasions, but without making any nearer advance than at first. Lady Caroline still made her a little inclination of her eyelids, though now and then she went so far as to say, "How do you do, Miss Despard?" All of this, however, Lottie would have pardoned, if the bride, when she went away, had but at least remembered her, and made her some little sign of farewell.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ABBEY PRECINCTS.

THE bells began to ring for evensong soon after the bridal party dispersed. Some of them, indeed, stayed for the beautiful service, which was a thing that visitors from a distance thought a great deal of, and there were a number of fine bonnets and dresses in the stalls when Lottie went in. The daily service was part of the daily life of the dwellers in the Abbey. There were those who went for devotion, and those who went for the music, and those who went because they had nothing else to do. It was an occupation and an amusement at the same time, and some people thought it a duty. To listen to the service more or less critically, to note if any of the boys' voices were breaking, and whether Rowley sniffed as usual, or Bowler, the great bass, was hoarse; to observe how the minor canons sang, if they were in too great a hurry to get through the service, and who it was that read the lessons; to look at any notable persons that might be there; visitors to the Deanery, or other persons of distinction; to walk in the nave while the Signor played the voluntary; and finally to pause and talk to one's

friends before going home to tea, was the established rule of St. Michael's. The old Chevaliers mixed with the ladies, here and there one. They were obliged to go in the morning, and they seldom repeated their church going in the afternoon; but still there were always two or three, and very interesting to strangers were the old soldiers, with their old moustaches and upright bearing. Some of them might have been veteran generals well entitled to command an army, and, indeed, there was valour enough among them, and such achievement as personal bravery is still capable of—enough to equip a dozen generals; but fortune had not been on the side of these noble old soldiers; and you may be sure there were no prosperous commanders among them. They stood about on the terrace in front of the Lodges and talked for five minutes or so before they went in to tea. But Lottie, when she came out of chapel and saw the last of the fine people streaming away in their light dresses through the aisle, did not feel much disposed to go indoors to Law and the bread and butter. They could wait. She went and leaned on the low wall close to the library and gazed out upon the landscape below. At the foot of the slope was the street of the little old town, a sweep of steep masonry, with old-fashioned red houses, like trees in autumn, on the other side; *and beyond these the river* meandered between its *leafy banks in endless windings*, and the great breadth

of champaign swept away towards the horizon. At this time of the year it was rich and cloudy with foliage: the trees arranging themselves in every kind of way, singly and in clumps, and groves, and long hedgerows, and surrounding every house and every village and every church spire as far as you could see. The billowy greenness thus spreading far into the silvery-grey of the distance; the sky of a pale blue, faint with summer heat and long drought: stretched out like a map before the gazer from that mount of vision. The mottled clouds were floating together and rolling into masses as if with the intention of putting a stop to this long reign of brightness, and the level lines of the landscape and the great vault of the sky dropped together into a haze which also spoke of rain. Lottie leaned disconsolately over the wall, spreading abroad her thoughts over this vast breadth of space and silence. She let them go like a flock of birds flying to all the winds. Thoughts! they were not thoughts but feelings, vague movements of the mind, half sentiment, half-personal sensation. Why she should have been so deeply affected by this marriage she could not have told anyone. She did not herself know. It seemed to penetrate through and through her system of life, unsettling everything. After the disappointments of her beginning at St. Michael's, this connection with the Deanery had seemed a thread of promise, a clue to something better; not a very splendid

promise indeed, but still something; a little link of ambition which looked finer and more noble after it was snapped than it had ever done before. It was not very noble in itself. Lottie felt vaguely that to have so strong a desire for admission within that charmed circle was not a very lofty thing. The people she had seen within it had not satisfied her ideal. Except that they dressed better (some of them at least), they had been very much like the humbler classes with which she was acquainted; and to wish for a footing among them only because they were better off and more highly thought of than her own neighbours, was not an elevating sentiment. In the perpetual disappointments to which she had been subject, the slights she had been obliged to put up with, Lottie had felt a great many pangs of shame mingled with the stings of humiliation. She had felt that it was the poorest of ambitions which had taken possession of her. And now that it was over, this sense of unworthiness still mingled with her consciousness of failure and exclusion. But though it might not be a door into heaven, still to feel that it was shut, to be obliged to turn away, and to see no other door at which she could enter, was hard. Her heart sank down into painful depths of abandonment, and tears came to her eyes in spite of herself. She had nothing to cry about, but her lips quivered and two big tears rose and hung suspended under her *long* eyelashes, so filling up the

whole space before her, that Lottie saw nothing but a waving greenness and blueness, a blurred shadow of earth and sky.

It was just at this moment, while she was still uncertain whether she could get these tears swallowed or whether they must fall, betraying her, that she was aware of some one at her elbow. "I think we shall have rain, Miss Despard," said a deliberate voice; "do you not think we shall have rain? The summer has been so fine that we have no right to grumble. You were the one lady in all St. Michael's whom I most wanted to see."

"I, Signor? I do not know what you should want with me," said Lottie, forced by circumstances into rudeness. She did not want to be rude, but the shock of his sudden address had brought down that shower, falling like drops of a thunderstorm, and she would not turn round to show him her wet eyes. He smiled a little to himself at this petulance, and that was all. He was used to waywardness in young ladies. He was a spare, olive-coloured man, not tall, but wiry and close-knit. He had all the aspect of an Italian and the name; but he was not really an Italian, being an Englishman born, a good Tory and a good Churchman, and all that the organist of St. Michael's ought to be. But he was not disinclined to keep up a mystery on this score, having a little love of mystery by nature, and feeling, musically, that his foreign name

and looks were in his favour. How far back the Signor had to go for his claim to be considered an Italian, nobody knew, but everybody (except the perverse and disagreeable, who would occasionally say Mr. Rossinetti to annoy him) called the musician the Signor. His complexion, his moustache, the wonderful dark eyes, which were the chief feature in his face, were all of Southern origin; and he spoke with a curious deliberation and clear pronunciation of every syllable, which almost looked as if, at one time, there had been difficulties about the language, and as if he had not courage even yet to take any liberties with it. But his accent was as good English as could be desired; and in respect to this as well as to all other questions about his origin the community of St. Michael's were entirely in the dark, as he intended them to be.

"This event," said the Signor, in his clear slow voice, "will bring our little societies, our practisings, to an end, Miss Despard. We were getting on very well. I am sorry to come to an end of anything, and of these above all."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Lottie, drearily. "Will it, do you think? She had not very much of a voice."

"No; but there are other things besides voice. You have a very beautiful voice, Miss Despard."

"But *I have nothing else*," said Lottie, forgetting *her precautions and turning* quickly upon him; "that

is what you mean to say? And you never even allowed before that I had a voice."

"No, not much else," said the deliberate organist; "you have no science, no method. You don't know how to manage what you have got. It is a fine organ by nature, but you cannot produce it as you ought, because you do not know how. To have so much and to do so little is a great pity. It is a waste of a great gift, it is——"

"How dare you tell me all this to my face?" said Lottie, transported with vivid anger. She would have taken it more quietly if she had not been weakened in spirit by the discouragement into which she had fallen before. Her fierce, sudden glance was even still unwillingly softened by the wetness of her eyes. But the Signor did not flinch. There was a kind of smile in his own as he met her look. He was not afraid of her. He looked, indeed, amiably, genially at Lottie—as she had never seen him look before—and as she turned round she became aware that he was not alone. Over his shoulder, with an alarmed, indignant aspect, which half amused while it consoled her, was another face with which Lottie was very well acquainted. It was the face of his favourite pupil, a young man who followed the Signor about like his shadow, always a few steps behind him, always in devout contemplation of him. But young Purcell was not of this mind to-day; he was looking at his be-

loved master with a mixture of rage and pathos very droll in their combination. Lottie was easily moved, and almost before the words of defiance had left her lips a laugh forced itself after them. She had to turn round again to conceal the conflict of sudden mirth in her face.

"Would you rather I said it to others than to you? No, because that would do you no good——"

"And do you really think that I—I——" Why should she laugh? Young Purcell's face brightened slightly, but took a still more curious look of bewildered inquiry. As for the Signor, he thought she had become hysterical, which he believed was a common weakness with womankind in general, and he was alarmed.

"I beg you a thousand pardons if I have seemed rude," he said. "All that I wanted was to begin the conversation; for I have — a little proposal to make."

"Do you call that beginning a conversation to tell me I am quite ignorant, and cannot sing, and waste my voice?" said Lottie, recovering her indignation. "It is not a very civil way."

"Miss Despard, I think you will miss the society's singing, and I want to tell you it was not good for you. These people were dazzled by your voice," said the organist, with unintentional confusion of metaphor, "and they made use of it. All these fine people, they

make use of us, and often forget to say 'thank you.' I was sorry that you should suffer, *too;* so was Purcell; he knows what it is—a little. And you have had no teaching, you have not had a thorough professional training as he has——"

Lottie turned upon him with flashing eyes; and this time she did not laugh at the young man who, over the Signor's shoulder, followed every movement of hers with such eager attention. His look of wonder and fear was not less comic than the other changes which had come over his countenance, but she took no notice of it. "I don't know what you mean," she said, "by professional training. What do I want with professional training? What has Mr. Purcell to do with it? What do you mean, or how should I suffer? If they thank me, or if they don't thank me, what is that to me?"

The Signor cast a glance round at young Purcell, who answered with a look of despair. "If you would but confide in us, we thought we could help you. Indeed, Miss Despard, it is no presumption on Purcell's part, only a fellow-feeling——"

"Only a feeling—of respect!" This Purcell timidly gasped out, with alarm painted on every feature. Lottie, turning her back to the wall and confronting the two musicians, solemnly made them a very awful curtsey. It was an art she had learned (though the teacher was unaware of the fact) from Lady Caroline;

and therefore it was of the very finest and most imposing kind.

"The puzzle is," she said grandly, in a voice not unlike Lady Caroline's, "what the link between us may be."

They were both silenced by this speech, and by her imposing aspect generally; for Lottie was very handsome, and this defiant grandeur suited her. Purcell felt disposed to sink into the earth, and showed it; but as for the Signor, he was less alarmed, and, indeed, a little amused—he had seen a great number of heroines, both in public and private life.

"It is always wrong to beat about the bush," he said. "Perhaps I have made a mistake; I thought you probably intended to sing, Miss Despard, as a profession."

"I!" Lottie's voice broke into a half shriek. "I!" The suggestion gave her a shock which it was hard to get over. She felt a trembling of giddiness and insecurity, as if the ground had suddenly been cut from under her; she could have cried for mortification, injured pride, horrible humbling and downfall. She who had been mourning this change as taking from her all chance of ascent into the society she had a right to, the society she really belonged to, and they thought it was professional work, a profession that she was thinking of! She drew back unconsciously to the support of the wall, and propped herself by it. She

could have cried, but pride would not let her. "You are mistaken, altogether mistaken," she said. "I don't suppose that you mean to insult me; but you forget that I am a gentleman's daughter."

Here the ghost of a smile flitted across the Signor's olive-coloured face. It was as momentary as the passing of a shadow, but yet Lottie saw it, and it stung her as nothing else could have done; she was angry before, but this excited her to passion. She could have flown at him and strangled him for this smile; she understood it well enough. "You smile!" she said. "You think, perhaps, that a poor Chevalier, a soldier who is not rich, is not a gentleman. You think it is only money that makes a gentleman. There are many people who are of that opinion; but," said Lottie with a smile, "you will perhaps not be surprised if I think differently. I will bid you good evening, please, now."

"One moment," said the Signor; "you must not go away with a wrong impression. Forgive me the mistake, if it is a mistake. You are mistaken, too, Miss Despard, if you think a gentleman's daughter may not sing—to the great generous public as well as to poor little coteries that never say thank you. You mistake, too; but never mind. I meant to have offered, if you would let me, to help you——"

"Thank you, very much!" said Lottie with great state, "it is not necessary. When I want lessons, I

can—ask for them, M. Rossinetti." She had been about to say *pay*, but Lottie was honest, and though she longed to inflict the insult, would not say what was not true. She did not even see young Purcell's pathetic looks as he gazed at her, with the air of a suppliant on his knees, over his master's shoulder; but she saw the half shrug of the Signor's shoulders as he stood aside to let her pass. And perhaps had she but known it there was something comic, too, in the dignity with which she swept past with a little wave of her hand. It was like Lady Caroline, though Lottie did not intend it to be so. The two musicians stood looking after her as she walked majestically homewards, with so many commotions in her bosom. She had to pass through the little square in which the lay clerks lived, on her way, and as if to accomplish Lottie's humiliation, Rowley the tenor—who was her teacher — was standing at his door as she passed. The Chevaliers of St. Michael's took little notice of the lay clerks as, may be supposed (except the O'Shaughnessys, who were not particular); and though Lottie was his pupil, Rowley had never transgressed the due limits of respectfulness or pretended to any friendship with the young lady. But the wedding had affected the morals of St. Michael's generally, and made a revolution for the day; and as Lottie passed, the tenor took advantage of the opportunity. "How are you, Miss?" he *said, with* a sniff and a lurch

which showed the source of his boldness; "wor come in and have a chat? won't you come i have some tea with my little girl, Miss Lottie?" heavens! what had Lottie done to be addres this way? and she knew that the two others hear this demonstration of intimacy. She rushe stumbling over her dress, wild with resentmer mortification. This was what it was to be poor in a false position, to be a poor gentlewoman the rich! One mortification had followed anotl that she did not know how to bear it. Au neglect, the Signor's insulting suggestion, and R familiarity! Lottie did not know which was th hard to bear. She never drew breath until sl reached her own door.

"Is that you, Lottie? and where have you l said Law. "Let's have tea now; I've been waitii waiting, wanting to go out, and wondering wh become of you." He had begun his bread and on the spot.

"Where is papa, Law?"

"Papa? How should I know? You didn't him, did you? I say, I'm going out—do make And look here! I wish you'd speak to him, I wish you'd tell him he oughtn't to; I'd give pounds (if I had it) not to have such an unc name!"

"It is a very good name—better than anyon

I know. The Despards never were anything but gentlemen."

"Oh! it's a great deal you know about it," said Law, with a groan. "Perhaps once upon a time we were somebody when everybody else was nobody! But when it turns the other way, when we are nobody and everybody else somebody, and when it's known wherever you go whose son you are——"

"You don't need to continue nobody," she said; "you are a boy, you can do what you like. If we are down now, *you* need not stay down, Law. But then you must not hang about and lose your time any longer. If you will work, you can soon change that."

"Can I!" said the youth; "that shows how much you know. I have never been taught to do anything. If I had been put apprentice to a butcher or a baker when I was young—but you never did anything but bully me to work and go to school. What good is school? If you are to do anything, you ought to be taught when you are young. I have been mismanaged. I doubt if I will ever be good for much now."

"Oh—h!" cried Lottie, with a deep breath of aspiration from the depths of her chest, "if it was only me! I should find something to do! I should not be long like this, lounging about a little bit of a place, following bad examples, doing no work. Oh, Law! if I could put some of me into you; if I could change places with you! Fancy what was said to me to-day:

the Signor came up to me when we came out of church, and asked me if I was going to sing—for a profession."

"By Jove!" cried Law! he woke up even from his bread and butter, and looked at her with sparkling eyes.

"I had almost said, 'You may be very glad my brother is not with me to hear you ask such a question.' But on the whole I am glad you were not. I said all that was necessary," said Lottie with dignity. "He will never repeat such an insult again."

"By Jove!" Law repeated, taking no heed of what she said, but looking at her with visibly increased respect. "Do you mean to say that he thought you good enough for that?"

"Good enough!" she said, with severe contempt. "I always knew I could sing; even poor mamma knew. But I did not condescend to say much to them. I said, 'I am a gentleman's daughter,' and walked away."

"Well, girls are very funny," said Law. "How you bully me about working! morning, noon, and night, you are never done nagging; but the moment it comes to your own turn——"

"To my own turn!" Lottie looked at him aghast.

"To be sure. Oh, that's all very fine about being a gentleman's daughter. We know pretty well what that means, and so does everybody. I wonder, Lottie,

you that have some sense, how you could be so silly? He must have laughed."

"Oh, hold your tongue, Law! I suppose they think nothing counts but money. When you are poor you are always insulted. I should not care for money, not for itself, not for the gold and silver," said Lottie; "nor even so very much for the nice things that one could buy; but, oh, to be above people's remarks, to be known for what you are, not looked down upon, not insulted——"

"It depends upon what you call being insulted," said Law; "if any man had said that to me, I should have thought him next to an angel. What is insulting about it? If you like money (and who doesn't like money?) why there's the easiest way in the world of getting it. Sing! I'd sing my head off," said Law, "if that was all that was wanted. And you sing *for pleasure;* you *like* singing! I can't tell what you are thinking of. If I had known you were so good as that—but one never thinks much of one's own sister, somehow," the youth added, with easy frankness. He was so much excited, however, that he left his tea, and strode up and down the room (three paces and a half, that was all the size of it) repeating "by Jove!" to himself. "If you mean not to do it, you had better not let *him* know you could do it," he announced, after an interval. Never *in* his life before had the

easy-going young man been so moved. "It's untold the money they make," he said.

As for Lottie, her whole being was in a ferment. She looked at her brother with a gasp of pain. The bread and butter had no charms for her on that night of emotion. She took up her basket which was full of things to mend, and sat down in the window, speechless with vague passion, pain, discontentment. Lottie was not a wise or enlightened young woman. She had not even taken the stamp of her age as many people do who are not enlightened. She had never learned that it was desirable that women should have professions like men. Her thoughts ran entirely in the old-fashioned groove, and it seemed to her that for "a gentleman's daughter" to work for her living, to be known publicly to work for her living, was a social degradation beyond words to express. It implied—what did it not imply? That the family were reduced to the lowest level of poverty; but that was a small part of it—that the men were useless, worthless, without pride or honour; that they had no friends, no means of saving themselves from this betrayal of all the secrets of pride. These were the foolish feelings in her mind. Gentlemen's daughters were governesses sometimes she had heard, and Lottie pitied the poor girls (orphans—they were always orphans, and thus set aside from the general rule), with an ache of compassion in her heart; but it was her private impression

that this was a stigma never to be wiped off, a stain, not upon the girl, but upon her family who could permit such a sacrifice. Lottie's view of sacrifice was one which is rarely expressed, but which exists not the less among women and all other persons from whom sacrifices are demanded. Could Alcestis have the same respect after for the man who could let her die for him? Could she go on living by his side and think just the same of him as if he had borne his own burden instead of shuffling it off upon her shoulders? The ancients did not trouble themselves with such questions, but it is a peculiarity of the modern mind that it does. And Lottie, though her point of view was very old-fashioned, still looked at it in this modern way. When Law, whom it was impossible to stir up to any interest in his own work, became so excited over the thought of a possible profession for her, she looked at him with something of the feeling with which Isabella contemplated the caitiff brother in his prison who would have bought his life by her shame. What! would he be "made a man" in such a way? would he buy idleness and ease for himself by exposing her to a life unworthy of "a gentleman's daughter"? She knew he was lazy, careless, and loved his own gratification; but it hurt her to her very heart to think so poorly of Law, who was the only being in the world whom she had ever been able to love heartily as belonging to herself.

Let it not be thought, however, that any unwillingness to work for Law, to make any sacrifice for him, was at the bottom of this disappointment in him. She was ready to have worked her fingers to the bone, indoors, in the privacy of the family, for her father and brother. She did not care what menial offices she did for them. Their "position" demanded the presence of a servant of some kind in the house, but Lottie was not afraid of work. She could sweep and dust; she could cook; she could mend with the most notable of housewives, and sang at her work, and liked her people all the better because of what she had to do for them in the course of nature. That was altogether different; there was no shame to a lady in doing this, no exposure of the family. And Lottie was not of the kind of woman who requires personal service from men. She was quite willing to serve them, to wait upon them if necessary, to take that as her share of the work of life; but to work publicly for her living, what was that but to proclaim to all the world that they were incapable, that they were indifferent to their duties, that there was no faith to be put in them? If Law had leaped up in wrath, if he had said, "No, it is my place to work; I will work; no one shall say that my sister had to earn her living," how happy, how proud Lottie would have been! That was the ideal for a man. It was what she would do herself if she was in his place; and, oh, if she could but put

herself in his place, and do what Law would not do! oh, if she could but put herself, a bit of herself, into him, to quicken the sluggish blood in his veins! When Law, having exhausted all that was to be said on the subject, went out (and where did he go when he went out?), Lottie sat at the window and darned and darned till the light failed her. She ploughed furrows with her needle in the forefinger of her left hand; but that did not hurt her. Oh, if she could but move them, inspire them, force them to do their duty, or at the worst do it for them, so that the world might suppose it was they who were doing it! That was the aspiration in her heart; and how hopeless it was! "Oh, if I could put some of me into him!" Lottie thought, as many a helpless soul has thought before her. But to move out from the shadow of the house, and betray its nakedness, and take the burden visibly on herself, that was what Lottie felt she would rather die than do.

Meanwhile, in the soft evening, various people were promenading up and down between the Abbey church and the lodges of the Chevaliers. Some of the old Chevaliers themselves were out, with their wives hanging on their arms. Either there would be two old gentlemen together, with the wife of one by his side, or two ladies with a white-haired old gallant walking along beside them, talking of various things, perhaps of politics when there *were two men*, and of any signs

of war that might be on the horizon; and if two were women, of the wedding, and how Lady Caroline took the marriage of her only daughter. The Signor was practising in the Abbey, and the great tones of the organ came rolling forth in a splendour of softened sound over the slope with its slowly strolling groups. Some of the townspeople were there too, not mixing with the others, for the Signor's practising nights were known. The moon began to climb after a while behind the Chevaliers' lodges, and throw a soft whiteness of broad light upon all the pinnacles of the Abbey; and Lottie dropped her work on her knee, unable to see any longer. When the moon rose, she was thrown into shade, and could watch the people with the light in their faces at her ease. And by and by her attention was caught by two single figures which passed several times, coming from different directions, and quite distinct from each other. They both looked up at her window each time they passed, calling forth her curiosity, her scorn, her laughter, finally her interest. Watching them she forgot the immediate presence of her own annoyances. One was the young musician Purcell, at whom Lottie had secretly laughed for a long time past, at his longing looks and the way in which the vicissitudes of her countenance would reflect themselves in his face. But the other she could not for a long time make out. It was not till, seeing no one, he stood still for a full

half-minute in the light of the moon, and looked up at her, that she recognised him—and then Lottie's heart gave a jump. It was young Rollo Ridsdale, Lady Caroline's nephew, the best man at the wedding; and what could he want here?

## CHAPTER IV.

### LADY CAROLINE.

LADY CAROLINE was in the drawing-room at the Deanery alone. Now that her daughter was married this was no unusual circumstance. It was late in the summer evening, after dinner, and she lay on a great square sofa so placed that the view from the large window was dimly visible from it, had she cared for the view. As a matter of fact, at no hour of the twenty-four, however bright or tempting it might be, did Lady Caroline care much for the view; but still, when a room is artistically arranged, such a possibility cannot be altogether kept out of consideration. This evening, however, there was no light to see anything by. The room was dark, nothing distinctly visible in it but the great broad Elizabethan window which filled one end. The upper part of this window was filled with old painted glass in silvery tinted quarries, soft greys and yellows, surrounding the golden and ruby glories of several blazons of arms, and drawing the eye irresistibly with the delight of radiant colour; underneath opened the great plain all dim and wide, a suggestion of boundless air and distance rather than a

landscape, while in the room itself nothing was distinct but here and there a glimmer of reflection from a mirror breaking the long line of the walls. Nor was its only occupant very distinguishable as she reclined upon her sofa in absolute stillness and tranquillity. The lace on her head and about her throat showed faintly white in the corner, that was all. Perhaps if the mind could have been seen as well as the body, Lady Caroline's individual soul, such as it was, would have told for little more amid the still life around: a something vaguely different from the chairs and softly cushioned sofas, a little more than one of the dim mirrors, a little less than a picture, was this human creature to whom all the rest belonged. She had lived irreproachably on the earth for a number of years (though not for nearly so many years as the most of her furniture), and fulfilled all her functions very much as they did, honestly holding together, affording a temporary place of repose occasionally, convenient for household meals, and ordinary domestic necessities. Perhaps now and then Lady Caroline conferred something of the same kind of solace and support which is given to the weary by a nice warm soft easy-chair, comfortably cushioned and covered; but that was about the highest use of which she was capable. She was waiting now quite tranquilly till it pleased the servants to bring *her lights. They* were in no hurry, and she *was in no hurry. She* never did anything, so that it

was immaterial whether her room was lighted early or late, and on the whole she liked this dim interval between the active daylight, when people were always in motion, and the lamps, which suggested work, or a book, or something of the sort. Lady Caroline, though she had not very much mind, had a conscience, and knew that it was not quite right for a responsible creature to be without employment; therefore she made certain efforts to fulfil the object of her existence by keeping a serious volume on the table beside her, and putting in a few stitches now and then in a piece of wool-work. But at this hour there was no possibility for the most anxious conscience to speak, and Lady Caroline's was not anxious, only correct, not troubling itself with any burden beyond what was necessary. It may be supposed, perhaps, that she was sad, passing this twilight quite alone, so soon after the marriage and departure of her only daughter; but this would have been a mistake, for Lady Caroline was not sad. Of course she missed Augusta. There was no one now to wake her up when she dozed, as now and then happened, in a warm afternoon after luncheon; and, as a matter of fact, one or two visitors had actually been ushered into the drawing-room while her head was drooping upon her right shoulder, and her cap a little awry. But at this tranquil hour in the dark, when nobody expected anything of her, neither without nor within—neither conscience, nor the Dean, nor society

—it cannot be said that any distressful recollection of Augusta mingled with her thoughts. Nor, indeed, had she any thoughts to mingle it with, which was perhaps the reason. She was very comfortable in the corner of her sofa, with nothing to disturb her. Had Jarvis her maid been at hand to tell her what was going on in the precincts, or any bit of gossip that might have floated upward from the town, it would probably have added a little more flavour to her content; but even that flavour was not necessary to her, and she was quite happy as she was.

Some one came into the room as she lay in this pleasant quiet. She thought it was Jeremie coming to light the candles, and said nothing; but it was not so dignified a person as Mr. Jeremie, the Dean's butler, who was generally taken for one of the Canons by visitors unacquainted with the place. This was indeed a shirt-front as dazzling as Jeremie's which came into the soft gloom, but the owner of it was younger and taller, with a lighter step and less solemn demeanour. He gave a glance round the room to see if anyone was visible, then advanced steadily with the ease of an *habitué* among the sofas and tables. "Are you here, Aunt Caroline?" he said. "Oh, you are there! Shall I ring for lights? it must be dull sitting all by yourself in the dark."

"If you please, my dear," said Lady Caroline, who, having no will of her own to speak of, never set it in

opposition to anybody else's; answering a question as she did thus promptly, there was no occasion at the same time to answer a mere remark.

"I am afraid you are moping," he said, "missing Augusta. To be sure, it does make a great difference in the house."

"No, my dear," said Lady Caroline, "I can't say I was thinking of Augusta. She is quite happy, you know."

"I hope so," he said, laughing. "If they are not happy now, when should they be happy? the honeymoon scarcely over, and all sorts of delights before them."

"Yes; that is just what I was going to say," said Lady Caroline; "so why should I mope?"

"Why, indeed?" He took his aunt's soft hand into his, and caressed it. Rollo was fond of his aunt, strange though it may appear. She had never scolded him, though this was the favourite exercise of all the rest of his family. When he came home in disgrace she had always received him just the same as if he had come in triumph. Whoever might find fault with him for wasting his talents, or disappointing the hopes of his friends, his Aunt Caroline had never done so. He could not help laughing a little as he spoke, but he caressed her soft white hand as he did so, compunctious, to make amends to her for the ridicule. Lady Caroline, it need not be said, attached no idea

of ridicule to his laugh. "But I have come to tell you," said Rollo, "that I have been out again walking up and down the Dean's Walk, as I did the night of the wedding, and I have not been able to hear a note of your singer—the girl with the wonderful voice."

"Did I say there was a girl with a wonderful voice, my dear? I forget."

"Not you, but Augusta; don't you remember, Aunt Caroline, a girl in the Cloisters, in—in the Lodges, a Miss—I don't remember the name. Lottie something, Augusta called her."

"Ah! Augusta was too ready to make friends. It is Miss Despard, I suppose."

"Well; might we not have Miss Despard here some evening? If her voice is as fine as Augusta said, it might be the making of me, Aunt Caroline. An English *prima donna* would make all our fortunes. And unless I hear her, it is not possible, is it, I appeal to your candour, that I can judge?"

"But, my dear!" "But" was a word which scarcely existed in Lady Caroline's vocabulary. It meant an objection, and she rarely objected to anything. Still there was a limit to which instinct and experience alike bound her. She was not unkind by nature, but rather the reverse, and if there was anything that approached a passion—nay, not a passion, an emotion—in her nature, it was for the poor. She who was little

moved by any relationship, even the closest, almost loved the poor, and would take trouble for them, petting them when they were sick, and pleased to hear of all their affairs when they were well—conscience and inclination supplementing each other in this point. But the poor, the real "poor," they who are so kind as to be destitute now and then, with nothing to eat and all their clothes at the pawnbroker's, and their existence dependent upon the clergyman's nod, or the visit of the district lady—these were very different from the Chevaliers in their Lodges. There even Lady Caroline drew the line. She did what was suggested to her in a great many cases, but here she felt that she could make a stand when necessity required. Not the people in the Lodges! people who though they lived in small houses on small incomes considered themselves to be ladies and gentlemen as good as the Royal Family themselves. The very mildest, the very gentlest, must pause somewhere, and this is where Lady Caroline made her stand. "My dear," she said, something like a flush coming to her sallow cheek, for Jeremie by this time had brought the lamps and lighted the candles and made her visible; "I have never visited the people in the Lodges. I have always made a stand there. There was one of them appointed through my brother Courtland, you know—your papa, my dear—but when *Beatrice* asked me to notice them I was obliged to *decline. I really* could not do it. I hope I never

shrink from doing my duty to the poor; but these sort of people—you must really excuse me, Rollo; I could not, I do not think I could do it."

Mr. Ridsdale had never seen anything so near excitement in his aunt's manner before. She spoke with little movements of her hands and of her head, and a pink flush was on her usually colourless face. The sight of this little flutter and commotion which he had caused amused the young man. Jeremie was still moving noiselessly about, letting down a loop of curtain, kindling a distant corner into visibility by lighting one of the groups of candles upon the wall. The room was still very dim, just made visible, not much more, and Jeremie's noiseless presence did not check the expression of Lady Caroline's sentiments. She made her little explanation with a fervour such as, we have said, her nephew had never before seen in her. He was greatly astonished, but he was also, it must be allowed, somewhat disposed to laugh.

"You must pardon me," he said, "for suggesting anything you don't like, Aunt Caroline. But did not Augusta have Miss Despard here?"

"Oh, yes—with the rest of her people who sang. Augusta was always having her singing people—who were not in our set at all."

"I suppose that is all over now," said Rollo in a *tone of regret.*

*"Oh, not quite over.* Mrs. Long brought some of

them the other day. She thought it would amuse me. But it never amused me much," said Lady Caroline. "Augusta was pleased, and that was all. I don't want them, Rollo; they disturb me. They require to have tea made for them, and compliments. I am not so very fond of music, you are aware."

"I know; not fond enough to give up anything for it; but confess it is often a resource after dinner, when the people are dull?"

"The people are always just the same, Rollo. If they have a good dinner, that is all I have to do with them. They ought to amuse themselves."

"Yes, yes," he resumed, laughing. "I know you are never dull, Aunt Caroline. Your thoughts flow always in the same gentle current. You are never excited, and you are never bored."

A gentle smile came over Lady Caroline's face; n one understood her so well. She was astonished th so many people found fault with Rollo. He was, s thought, her favourite nephew, if it was right to ha a favourite. "It is no credit to me," she said. "I w always brought up in that way. But girls do not h such a good training now."

"No, indeed—the very reverse, I think—they either in a whirl of amusement or else they are bo But, Aunt Caroline, people in general are not like And for us who have not had the advantage of *education, it* is often very dull, especially after di

Now you are going to have a gathering to-morrow. Don't you think it would be a good thing to have a little music in the evening, and ask Miss Despard to come and sing? Have her to amuse the people, just as you might have Punch and Judy, you know, or some of the sleight-of-hand men?"

"I should never think of having either the one or the other, Rollo."

"But a great many people do. It was quite the right thing for a time. Come, Aunt Caroline! My uncle is often bored to death with these duty dinners. He will bless you if you have a little music afterwards and set him free."

"Do you really think so? I can't understand why you should all talk of being bored. I am never bored," said Lady Caroline.

"That is your superiority," said the courtier. "But we poor wretches often are. And I really must hear this voice. You would not like to stand in the way of my interests now when I seem really about to have a chance?"

"It is a very curious thing to me," said Lady Caroline, stimulated by so much argument to deliver herself of an original remark, "that such a clever young man as you are, Rollo, should require to connect yourself with singers and theatres. Such a thing was never heard of in my time."

"That is just it," he said, putting on a mournful

look. "If I had not been a clever young man, things would have gone a great deal better with me. There was nothing of that foolish description I am sure, Aunt Caroline, in your time."

"No," she said; then added, almost peevishly, "I do not know how to communicate with the girl, Rollo. She is so out of society."

"But only on the other side of the way," he said. "Come, write her a note, and I will take it myself, if Jeremie or Joseph are too grand to go."

"Must I write her a note? I never in my life sent a note to the Lodges," said Lady Caroline, looking at her hands as if the performance would soil them. Then she added, with a look of relief, "I very often see her when I am out for my drive. You can tell the coachman to stop if he sees her, and I will tell her to come —that will be much the better way."

"But if she should be engaged?"

Lady Caroline gave him a very faint smile of amiable scorn and superior knowledge. "You forget these people are not in society," she said.

To make head against this sublime of contempt was more than Rollo could do. Lady Caroline vanquished him as she had vanquished many people in her day, by that invincible might of simple dulness against which nothing can stand.

Mr. Rollo Ridsdale was one of the many very clever young men in society who are always on the

eve of every kind of fame and fortune, but never manage to cross the border between hope and reality. He had been quite sure of success in a great many different ways: at the university, where he was certain of a first class, but only managed to "scrape through" the ordeal of honours in the lowest room;—in diplomacy, where he was expected to rise to the highest rank, but spoiled all his chances by a whisper of a state secret, of no importance to anybody, when only an unpaid attaché;—in the House of Commons, where he broke down in his maiden speech, after costing what his family described as a "fortune" to secure his election;—and finally, in commerce, where his honourable name was just secured from the *éclat* of a disgraceful bankruptcy by the sacrifice of a second "fortune" on the part of the family. It is but fair to add, however, that Rollo had nothing to do with the disgracefulness of the commercial downfall in which he was all but involved. And here he was at eight-and-twenty once more afloat, as the fashionable jackal and assistant of an enterprising *impresario*, indefatigable in his pursuit of the prima donna of the future, and talking of nothing but operas. This was why he had made that moonlight promenade under Lottie Despard's windows on the evening of his cousin's wedding-day. He did not know her, but Lottie knew him as the populace know all, even the most insignificant, members of the reigning *family*. Lady Caroline's nephew,

Augusta's cousin, was of much more importance to the community than any of the community had been to him up to this moment, though the thoughts which passed through Lottie's mind, as, with extreme surprise, she recognised him gazing up at her window, suggested a very different hypothesis. What could Lottie imagine, as, with the most bewildering astonishment, she identified Mr. Ridsdale, but that he had seen her as she had seen him, and that it was admiration at least, if not a more definite sentiment, which brought him to wander in front of the window, as poor young Purcell did, whose delusion she regarded without either surprise or compassion? Rollo Ridsdale was a very different person; and Lottie had been too much bewildered by his appearance to found any theory upon it, except the vaguest natural thrill of flattered pleasure and wonder. Was it possible?—When a young man comes and stares at a lady's window, going and returning, waiting apparently for a glimpse of her—what is anyone to suppose?—There is but one natural and ordinary explanation of such an attitude and proceeding. And if Lottie's fancy jumped at this idea, how could she help it? It gave her a little shock of pleasure and exhilaration in her depressed state. Why should she have been exhilarated? It is difficult to say. She did not know anything of Mr. Ridsdale—whether his admiration was worth having or the reverse. But he was Lady Caroline's nephew, who had always been inac-

cessible to Lottie; he was Augusta's cousin, who had neglected her. And if it really could be possible that, notwithstanding this, he had conceived a romantic passion for Lottie, what could be more consolatory to the girl who had felt herself humiliated by the indifference and contempt with which these ladies had treated her? The idea brought the light back to her eyes, and her natural gay courage revived again. She would make reprisals, she would "be even with them," and pay them back in their coin; and where is the girl or boy to whom reprisals are not sweet?

This, however, is a digression from Lady Caroline, who went to her tranquil couch that night with a heavier heart than she had known for years. It was a revolution which had occurred in her life. During Augusta's reign she had been passively resistant always, protesting under her breath against the invasion of the singing people of all kinds into her sacred and exclusive world. She had supported it with heroic calm, entrenching herself behind the ladies who were really in society, and whom she could receive without derogation; but to Lottie and the other people who were outside of her world she had never shown any civility, as she was glad to think, on surveying the situation that night. She had not brought it on herself. She had never shown them any civility. A salutation with her eyelids, a cup of tea from her table, the privilege of breathing the *same air with her*—this had been all

she had ever done for her daughter's *protégées*, and hitherto nobody, she was obliged to allow, had presumed upon it. But *that* Miss Despard was not like the timid and respectful singing ladies from the town. She was a bold young woman, who thought herself as good as anyone, and looked as if she ought to be talked to, and taken notice of, as much as anyone. And it was not possible to get rid of her as the ladies in the town could be got rid of. Lady Caroline could not go out of her own door, could not go to Church, without meeting Miss Despard, and feeling what she called within herself, "the broad stare" of that dangerous girl. And now was it possible, was it conceivable, that she was herself to take the initiative and re-invite Miss Despard? Not for years, if indeed ever in her life, had Lady Caroline gone to bed with such a weight on her mind. She sighed as she laid down on that bed of down—nay, not of down, which is old-fashioned and not very wholesome either, now-a-days, people say —but on her mattress of delicately arranged springs, which moved with every movement. She sighed as she lay down upon it, and the springs swayed under her; and she sighed again in the morning as she woke, and all that had happened came back into her mind. Poor dear Rollo! She did not like to cross him, or to go against him, since he had made so great an object of it. Oh! that Augusta had but held her peace, and *had not* inflamed his mind about this girl's voice!

After all, her voice was nothing wonderful; it was just a soprano, as most girl's voices were; and that she, Lady Caroline, should be compelled to exert herself—compelled to go against her principles, to come into personal contact with a person of a different class! She who had always been careful to keep herself aloof! —It was very hard upon Lady Caroline. She sighed at breakfast so that the Dean took notice of it.

"Is there anything the matter?" he said. "Rollo, do you know what is the matter? This is the third time I have heard your aunt sigh."

"I am sure she does not look as if anything was the matter," said Rollo, with that filial flattery which women like, at Lady Caroline's age.

She gave him a faint little smile, but shook her head and sighed again.

"Bless my soul!" said the Dean, "I must look in upon Enderby, and tell him to come and see you."

"Oh, there is nothing the matter with me," Lady Caroline said; but she had no objection to see Enderby, who was the doctor and always very kind. It even pleased her to think of confiding her troubles to him, for indeed she had the humbling consciousness upon her mind that she had never been a very interesting patient. She had never had anything but headaches and mere external ills to tell him about. She had never till now been able to reveal to him even a headache which had been caused by trouble of mind.

Lady Caroline, though she was dull, had a faint wish to be interesting as well as other people, and it would be a relief to pour out this trouble to his sympathising ear.

The idea of meeting Lottie when she went out was a very happy one, Lady Caroline thought. She could not, but feel that necessity was producing invention within her. Perhaps she might not meet Lottie, perhaps Lottie might be frightened and would decline to come. She drove out that afternoon with a little excitement, full of hope, if she felt also the palpitation of a little fear. These emotions made quite a pleasant and unusual stir in the dull fluid that filled her veins. She was half disturbed and half pleased when she found that Rollo proposed going with her, a very unusual compliment from a young man. He said it was because he had hurt his foot and could not walk. "Dear me!" Lady Caroline said, "I will send Jarvis to see if it is a sprain." "Oh no, it is not a sprain," he said; "a little rest is all it requires." "You will find carriage exercise very nice," Lady Caroline said; "a perfect rest—and much more amusement than walking, which tires one out directly." And thus they set out perfectly pleased with each other. But the coachman had got his instructions carefully from Rollo's own lips, and there was now no possibility of escape for the poor lady, over whom Rollo himself had mounted guard. They had not gone above a few yards from

the Deanery door, when the carriage suddenly drew up with a jar, to the side of the high terrace pavement which lay in front of the Lodges. Rollo, who was on the alert, looked eagerly out, and saw a light erect figure, full of energy and life, coming up, in the plainest of morning frocks, one of those simple toilettes which fashion has lately approved. She looked perfectly fresh, and like the summer morning, as she came along, with a little basket in her hand; and suddenly it burst upon Rollo, as Lottie raised her eyes with a glance of astonished interest in them, wondering why it was that Lady Caroline's carriage should stop there, that this unknown girl was extremely handsome—a thing for which the young man had not been prepared. "Is this Miss Despard? but she will be gone unless you send to her. Shall I go and call her to you?" he said.

"Oh, she will come when she sees I want her," said Lady Caroline. But the only answer he made was to jump up and let himself out of the carriage before Joseph could get off from the box. He went up to Lottie with his hat in his hand, very much surprised in his turn by the vivid blush which covered her cheeks at sight of him. He was flattered, and he was surprised; was it a mere trick of unformed manners, the *gaucherie* of a girl who had never been in society, and did not know how to behave herself? or was it that she saw something unusually fascinating in himself, Rollo? To see so handsome a girl blush at

his approach was a tribute to his attractions, wh
Rollo was not the man to be indifferent to. He alm
forgot the business side of the transaction, and
hunt after a prima donna, in the pleasure of such
encounter. Could she have seen him somewhere
fore and been "struck" with him? Rollo wonde
It was an agreeable beginning. He went up to
with his hat in his hand as if she had been a princ
"I beg your pardon," he said, "my aunt, Lady Carol
Huntington, has sent me to beg that you would let
speak to you for a moment." Lottie looked at h
bewildered, with eyes that could scarcely meet h
She could hardly make out what he said, in the s
den confusion and excitement of meeting thus, face
face, the man whom she had seen under her wind
What was it? Lady Caroline asking to speak with h
awaiting her, in her carriage, in the sight of all
Michael's! Lottie stood still for a moment, and ga
at this strange sight, unable to move or speak
wonder. What could Lady Caroline have to say? S
could not be going, on the spot, out of that beauti
chariot with its prancing horses, to plead her nephe
suit with the girl who knew nothing of him except
lover-like watch under her window. Lottie could
trust herself to make him any reply—or rather
said idiotically, "Oh, thank you," and turned h
reluctant, confused, and anxious, to obey the call. S
went to the carriage door, and stood without a wo

with her eyes full of wonder, to hear what the great lady had to say.

But it was not much at any time that Lady Caroline had to say. She greeted Lottie with the little movement of her eyelids. "How do you do, Miss Despard?" she said. "I wanted to ask if you would come to the Deanery this evening for a little music?" There was no excitement in that calmest of voices. Lottie felt so much ashamed of her wonderful vague absurd anticipations, that she blushed more hotly than ever.

"At half-past nine," said Lady Caroline.

"You have not presented me to Miss Despard, Aunt Caroline—so I have no right to say anything; but if I had any right to speak, I should say I hope—I hope—that Miss Despard is not engaged, and that she will come."

How earnest his voice was! and what a strange beginning of acquaintance! Lottie felt half disposed to laugh, and half to cry, and could not lift her eyes in her confusion to this man who—was it possible?—was in love with her, yet whom she did not know.

"Oh, I am not engaged—I—shall be very happy." What else could she say? She stood still, quite unaware what she was doing, and heard him thank her with enthusiasm, while Lady Caroline sat quite passive. And then the splendid vision rolled away, and Lottie stood alone wondering, like a creature in a dream, on the margin of the way.

## CHAPTER V.

### AT THE DEANERY.

LOTTIE stood as if in a dream, hearing the ringing of the horses' hoofs, the roll of the carriage, and nothing more; all the sounds in the world seemed to be summed up in these. She could scarcely tell what had happened to her. A great honour had happened to her, such as might have impressed the imagination of anyone in that little world of St. Michael's, but not so great a thing as she thought. Lady Caroline had asked her to tea. It was something, it was much; it was what Lady Caroline had never done to anyone in the Lodges before. Even Mrs. Seymour, whose husband was really *one of the Seymours*, people said, and whom Lady Courtland had begged Lady Caroline to be kind to, had not been so honoured. But for all that, it was not what Lottie thought. She stood there with her heart beating, feeling as if she had just fallen from the clouds, in a maze of bewildered excitement, scarcely able to realise what had befallen her—and yet that which had befallen her was not what she thought. Most things that happen to us are infinitely better in thought and in hope than they are in reality;

but this was doubly, trebly the case with poor Lottie, who found the cause of this new happiness of hers in a delusion, a mistake, most innocently, most unwittingly occasioned. It was not a thing that anybody had intended. Rollo Ridsdale had meant no harm when he strolled along the Dean's Walk in the evening on two separate nights, looking up at Lottie's window and hoping to hear her sing in order that he might tell his partner of a new voice to be had for the asking. And neither had Lottie meant any harm; it was not vanity, it was the most natural conclusion from what she saw with her own eyes. How could she doubt it? He must have seen her when she was not aware of it, and fallen in love with her, as people say, at first sight! a romantic compliment that always goes to a girl's heart. There was no other interpretation to be put upon the fact of his lingering about looking up at her window. She had said to herself it was nonsense; but how could it be nonsense? What other explanation could anyone give of such a proceeding? And now he had managed to make Lady Caroline, she who was the queen of the place and unapproachable, take his cause in hand. For what other possible reason could Lady Caroline, who never noticed anyone out of her own sphere, have paid this special and public compliment to Lottie, and invited her to Paradise, as it were—to tea—not afternoon tea, which means little, but *in the evening?* But here Lottie's

fancies became so bewildering that she could not follow herself in her thoughts; much less would it be possible for us to follow her. For if Lady Caroline had thus interfered on her nephew's behalf, securing for him a personal introduction and an opportunity of making her acquaintance, what could this mean but that Lady Caroline was on his side and meant to help him and approved of his sentiments? This thought was too wonderful to be entertained seriously; it only glanced across the surface of Lottie's mind, making her laugh within herself with a bewildered sense that there was something absurd in it. Lady Caroline stoop from her high estate to lift her, Lottie, to a place upon that dazzling eminence! The girl felt as if she had been spun round and round like a teetotum, though it was an undignified comparison. She did not know where she might find herself when, dizzy and tottering, she should come to herself. All this time Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, at her window, where she always sat surveying everything that went on, had been knocking an impatient summons with her knuckles on the pane; and this it was at last which brought Lottie to herself. She obeyed it with some reluctance, yet at the same time she was glad to sit down somewhere till the giddiness should go off and the hurry of her thoughts subside. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy met her with a countenance full of interest and eagerness; a new incident was everything to her. She was as eager as

if it was of vital importance to know every word that Lady Caroline said.

"Then what was she saying to ye, me dear?" cried the old lady, from whom excitement almost took away the breath.

"She did not say anything," said Lottie, relieving her feelings by a little laugh. "She never does say anything; she asked me to tea."

"And you call that nothing, ye thankless creature! It's spoilt ye are, Lottie, me darling, and I always said that was what would come of it. She asked you to tea? sure it'll be afternoon tea for one of the practisings, like it was in Miss Augusta's day?"

"No! I am to go in after dinner. It is not the first time, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy; Augusta has often asked me. What else did I get my white frock for?—for there are no parties here to go to. She used to say: 'Come in, and bring your music.' It is not me they want, it is my voice," said Lottie assuming a superiority of wisdom which she did not possess.

"All in good time, me dear," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. "And did my Lady Caroline bid you to bring your music, too? The daughter is one thing, and the mother is clean another. I hope you've got your frock in order me darlin'; clean and nice and like a lady? You should send it to Mrs. Jones to iron it out; she's the plague of my life, but she's a beautiful clear starcher—that *I will say for her;* and if you want a

ribbon or so, me jewel, or anything I have that ye may take a fancy to—there's my brooch with O'Shaughnessy's miniature, sure ne'er a one of them would find out who it was. You might say it was your grandpapa, me honey, in his red coat, with his medals; and fine he'd look on your white frock——"

"Thank you!" said Lottie in alarm; "but I never wear anything, you know, except poor mamma's little pearl locket."

"Sure I know," said the old woman, with a laugh; "a body can't wear what they haven't got! But you needn't turn up your little nose at my big brooch, for when it was made it was the height of the fashion, and now everything that's old is the height of the fashion. And so me Lady Caroline, that's too grand to say 'Good morning to ye, ma'am,' or 'Good evening to ye,' after ye've been her neighbour for a dozen years, stops her grand carriage to bid this bit of a girl to tea, and Miss Lottie takes it as cool as snowballs, if ye please. Well, well, honey! I don't envy ye, not I; but you're born to luck as sure as the rest of us are born to trouble, and that all the Abbey can see."

"I born to luck! I don't think there is much sign of it," said Lottie, though with a tumultuous leap of the heart which contradicted the words. "And what is there, I should like to know, that all the Abbey can see?"

"*If you* think I'm going to tell you the nonsense

that is flying about, and put fancies in your little head!" said the old Irishwoman, "go your ways, and see that your frock's in order; and I'll run in and see you dressed, me pet, and I'll bring the brooch and the box with me best ribbons; may be at the last you'll change your mind."

Lottie went home with her head in the clouds; was she indeed "born to luck"? Was she going to be transplanted at once without the tedious probation which even in poetry, even in story-books, the good heroine has generally to go through, into that heaven of wealth and rank and luxurious surroundings which she felt to be her proper sphere? It was not that Lottie cared for luxury in its vulgarer forms; she liked what was beautiful and stately—the large noble rooms, the dignified aspect which life bore when unconnected with those small schemes and strugglings in which her existence was spent; but above all she liked, it must be allowed, to be uppermost, to feel herself on the highest round of the ladder—and hated and resisted with all her soul the idea of being inferior to anybody. This was the thing above all others which Lottie could not bear. She had been brought up with the idea that she belonged by right of nature to the upper classes, a caste entirely removed by immutable decree of Providence from shop-keepers and persons engaged in trade, and to whom it was comparatively immaterial whether they were *poor or rich*, nothing being able to

alter the birthright which united them with all that was high and separated them from all that was low. But this right had not been acknowledged at St. Michael's. She and her family had been mixed up in the crowd along with the O'Shaughnessys, and other unexalted people; and nobody, not even the O'Shaughnessys, had been impressed by the long descent of the Despard family and its unblemished gentility. Something else then evidently was requisite to raise her to her proper place, to the sphere to which she belonged. Lottie would not have minded poverty, or difficulty, or hard work, had she been secure of her "position"; but that was just the thing of which in present circumstances she was least secure. It was for this reason that Lady Caroline's notice was sweet to her—for this that she had been so deeply disappointed when no sign of amity was accorded to her on the wedding-day. And this was why her heart leapt with such bewildering hope and excitement at the new event in her career. She did not know Mr. Ridsdale; perhaps his admiration or even his love were little worth having; and nothing but what are called interested motives could have possibly moved Lottie to the thrill of pleasure with which she contemplated his supposed attachment. A girl whose head is turned by the mere idea of a lover who can elevate her above her neighbours, without any possibility of love on her part to excuse the bedazzlement, is not a very fine or noble

image; yet Lottie's head was turned, not vulgarly, not meanly, but with an intoxication that was full of poetry and all that is most ethereal in romance. A tender, exquisite gratitude to the man who thus seemed to have chosen her, without any virtue of hers, filled her heart; and to the great lady who, though so lofty, and usually cold as marble to the claims of those beneath her, could thus forget her pride for Lottie. This feeling of gratitude softened all the other emotions in her mind. She was ready to be wooed, but then the very manner of the first step in this process, the lingering outside her window, which was a sign of the tenderest, most delicate, and reverential love-making (but she did not think it so in the case of poor young Purcell), showed what a respectful, ethereal, poetical wooing it would be. Thus Lottie's whole being was full of the most tremulous, delicious happiness, all made up of hope and anticipation, and grateful admiration of the fine generous sentiments of her supposed lover, even while it was founded, as you may say, on self-interest and ambition, and sentiments which were not generous at all.

And with what a flutter at her heart she put out her white muslin frock, which (not having any confidence in Mrs. Jones) she ironed herself most carefully and skilfully, with such interest in keeping it fresh as no Mrs. Jones in the world could have. For girls who have no ornaments *to speak of*, how kind summer is

providing roses, which are always the most suitable of decorations! One knot of them in her hair and one at her breast—what could Lottie want more? Certainly not the big brooch with Major O'Shaughnessy in his red coat, which her old friend was so anxious to pin the roses with. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy thought it would be "such a finish," and prove satisfactorily that it was not poverty but fancy that made Lottie decorate herself with fresh flowers instead of the fine artificial wreath with a nice long trail down the back, which was what the old lady herself would have preferred. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, however, was mollified by the girl's acceptance of the Indian shawl which she brought to wrap her in. "And you might just carry it into the room with you, me dear, as if ye thought ye might feel chilly," said the old lady, "for it's a beauty, and I should like me Lady Caroline to see it. I doubt if she's got one like it. Good-night and a pleasant evening to ye, me honey," she cried, as, under charge of Law, and with her dress carefully folded up, Lottie with her beating heart went across the broad gravel of the Dean's Walk to the Deanery door. It was a lovely summer night, not dark at all, and the Signor was practising in the Abbey, and the music rolling forth in harmonious thunders rose, now more, now less distinct, as the strain grew softer or louder. A great many people were strolling about, loitering, when Lottie came out, skimming over the road in her little white

shoes, with the roses in her hair. All the rest of her modest splendours were hidden by the shawl, but these could not be hidden. The people about all turned their heads to look at her. She was going to the Deanery. It was the same in St. Michael's as visiting the Queen.

The Dean's dinner party had been of a slightly heavy description. There were several of the great people from the neighbourhood, county people whom it was necessary to ask periodically. It was so distinctly made a condition, at the beginning of this story, that we were not to be expected to describe the doings on Olympus, nor give the reader an insight into the behaviour of the gods and goddesses, that we feel ourselves happily free from any necessity of entering into the solemn grandeur of the dinner. It was like other dinners in that region above all the clouds. The ladies were fair and the gentlemen wise, and they talked about other ladies and gentlemen not always perhaps equally wise or fair. Mr. Rollo Ridsdale was the greatest addition to the party. He knew all the very last gossip of the clubs. He knew what Lord Sarum said to Knowsley, upbraiding him for the indiscretion of his last Guildhall speech. "But everybody knows that Knowsley is nothing if not indiscreet," Rollo said; and he knew that, after all, whatever anyone might say to the contrary, Lady Martingale *had* gone off with *Charley Crowther*, acknowledging that

nothing in the world was of any consequence to her in comparison. "Such an infatuation!" for, as everybody knew, Charley was no Adonis. Lady Caroline shook her head over this, as she ate her chicken (or probably it was something much nicer than chicken that Lady Caroline ate). And thus the *menu* was worked through. There was but one young lady in the party, and even she was married. In Augusta's time the young people were always represented, but it did not matter so much now. When all these ladies rose at last in their heavy dresses that swept the carpet, and in their diamonds which made a flicker and gleam of light about their heads and throats, and swept out to the drawing-room: all, with that one exception, over middle age, all well acquainted with each other, knowing the pedigrees and the possessions each of each, and with society in general for their common ground, the reader will tremble to think of such a poor little thing as Lottie, in her white muslin, with the roses in her hair, standing trembling in a corner of the big drawing-room, and waiting for the solemn stream of silk and satin, and society, in which she would have been engulfed at once, swallowed up and seen no more. And what would have happened to Lottie, had she been alone, without anyone to stand by her in the midst of this overflowing, we shrink from contemplating; but happily she had already found a *companion* to hold head with her against the stream.

For when Lottie came in, she found some one before her in the drawing-room, a tall, very thin man, with stooping shoulders, who stood by the corner of the mantelpiece, on which there were candles, holding a book very close to his eyes. When Lottie went in, with her heart in her mouth, he turned round, thinking that the opening of the door meant the coming of the ladies. The entrance, instead, of the one young figure, white and slender, and of Lottie's eyes encountering him, full of fright and anxiety, yet with courage in them—the look that was intended for Lady Caroline, and which was half a prayer, "Be kind to me!" as well as perhaps the tenth part of a defiance —made a great impression upon the solitary inmate of the room. He was as much afraid of what he thought a beautiful young lady, as Lottie was of the mistress of the house.

After this first moment, however, when she perceived that there was nobody alarming, only a gentleman (an *old* gentleman, Lottie contemptuously, or rather carelessly concluded, though he was not more in reality than about five-and-thirty), she regained her composure, and her heart went back to its natural place. Lottie knew very well who the gentleman was, though he did not know her. It was Mr. Ashford, one of the minor canons, a very shy and scholarly person, rather out of his element in a community which did not pretend to much scholarship or any special

devotion to books. Perhaps he was the only man in St. Michael's whom Lottie had ever really desired to make acquaintance with on his own account; but indeed it was scarcely on his own account, but on account of Law, about whom she was always so anxious. Mr. Ashford took pupils, with whom he was said to be very successful. He lived for his pupils, people said, and thought of nothing else but of how to get them into shape and push them on. It had been Lottie's dream ever since she came to St. Michael's to get Law under Mr. Ashford's care; and after she had recovered the shock of getting into the room, and the mingled thrill of relief and impatience at finding that there was nobody there as yet to be afraid of, Lottie, whose heart always rose to any emergency, began to speculate how she could make friends with Mr. Ashford. She was not afraid of him: he was short-sighted, and he was awkward and shy, and a great deal more embarrassed by her look than she was by his. And he was being badly used—so she thought. Why was not he asked to dinner like the others? Mr. Ashford did not himself feel the grievance, but Lottie felt it for him. She ranged herself instantly, instinctively, by his side. They were the two who were being condescended to, being taken notice of—they were the natural opponents consequently of the fine people, the people who condescended and patronised. Mr. Ashford, on his side, stood and looked at her, and did

not know what to do. He did not know who she was. She was a beautiful young lady, and he knew he had seen her in the Abbey; but further than this Mr. Ashford knew nothing of Lottie. The signs which would have betrayed her lowly condition to an experienced eye said nothing to him. Her white muslin might have been satin for anything he could tell, her little pearl locket a priceless ornament. He did not know how to address such a dazzling creature; though to any ordinary person in society Lottie's attire would have suggested bread-and-butter, and nothing dazzling at all.

"It is a beautiful evening," said Lottie, a little breathless. "It is scarcely dark yet, though it is half-past nine o'clock."

To both these unquestionable statements Mr. Ashford said "Yes," and then he felt himself called upon to make a contribution in return. "I have just found a book which somebody must have been reading," he said, growing red with the effort.

"Oh, yes! is it a very interesting book? What is it about?" said Lottie, but this was something for which Mr. Ashford was not prepared. He got redder than ever and cleared his throat.

"It does not seem about anything in particular. I have not really had time to read it;" then he made a hasty dash at an abstract subject, and said, with a

falter in his voice, "Are—are you fond of reading?" This question at once lit up Lottie's face.

"Oh, *very*, very fond! But I have not many books nor much time. I always envy people who can read everything they please. Mr. Ashford, I wonder if I might speak to you about something—before they come in," said Lottie, coming a step nearer, and looking eagerly at him with her dangerous blue eyes.

Mr. Ashford got the better of his shyness in a moment. It did not embarrass him when there was anything to be done. He smiled upon her with a most beautiful beaming smile which altogether changed the character of his face, and put a chair for her, which Lottie, however, did not take. "Surely," he said, in his melodious voice, suddenly thawed out of the dryness which always got into his throat when he spoke first to a stranger. It has not yet been said that Mr. Ashford's chief quality as respected the community at St. Michael's was an unusually beautiful mellow voice. "If there is any way in which I can be of use to you?" he said.

"Oh, yes; so much use! They say you think a great deal about your pupils, Mr. Ashford," said Lottie, "and I have a brother whom nobody thinks much about——"

That was the moment Lady Caroline chose to return to the drawing-room. The door opened, the ladies swept in one by one, the first looking suspiciously

at both Mr. Ashford and Lottie, the second, who knew Mr. Ashford, giving him a smile of recognition, and looking suspiciously only at Lottie, the rest following some one example, some the other. Lottie knew not one of them. She looked trembling for Lady Caroline, and hoped she would be kind, and save her from the utter desolation of standing alone in this smiling and magnificent company. But Lady Caroline coming in last of all, only made her usual salutation to the stranger. She said, "Good evening, Miss Despard," as she swept her long train of rustling silk over the carpet close to Lottie's trembling feet, but she put out her hand to Mr. Ashford. "It was so good of you to come," she said. Alas! Lottie was not even to have the comfort of feeling on the same footing with the minor canon. He was carried off from her just as he had begun to look on her with friendly eyes. The stream flowed towards the other side of the room, where Lady Caroline seated herself on her favourite square sofa. Lottie was left standing all alone against the soft grey of the wall, lighted up by the candles on the mantelpiece. When a person belonging to one class of society ventures to put a rash foot on the sacred confines of another, what has she to expect? It is an old story, and Lottie had gone through it before, and ought to have had more sense, you will say, than to encounter *it again.* But the silly girl felt it as *much as if she had not* quite known what would

happen to her. She stood still, feeling unable to move, one wave of mortification and indignation going over her after another. How could they be so cruel? What did they ask her for, if they meant to leave her to stand there by herself? And Mr. Ashford, too, was cruel. She had made up her mind to stand by him; but he had been carried away by the first touch; he had not stood by her. Lottie could have torn off the roses with which she had decked herself so hopefully, and stamped her foot upon them. She almost wished she had the courage to do it, to cry out to those careless people and let them see what unkindness they were doing. Meantime she made a very pretty picture without knowing it. "Look at that pretty, sulky girl against the wall," said the young married lady to her mother. "Lady Caroline must have set her there on purpose to look handsome and ill-tempered. How handsome she is! I never saw such eyelashes in my life; but as sulky as a thundercloud."

"Go and talk to her and then she will not be sulky," said the mother, who, though by instinct she had looked suspiciously at Lottie, was not unkind; nay, was a kind woman when she saw any need for it. Neither were the others unkind—but they did not see any need for it. It was Lady Caroline's business, they *thought, to* entertain her own guests.

*Lottie,* however, had her triumph later when she

sang, all the whispered conversation in the room stopping out of sheer astonishment. Her voice had developed even within the last month or two, during which there had been no singing in the Deanery, and as the Signor, who had come in after his practising, played her accompaniments for her, and did his very best to aid and heighten the effect of her songs, her success was complete. He had never accompanied her before, which was a fact Lottie did not remember. And she did not notice either in her preoccupation, thinking nothing of this but much of less important matters—that he knew everything she could sing best, and humoured, and flattered, and coaxed her voice to display itself to the very fullest advantage, as only a skilful accompanyist can. No doubt he had his motive. As for Rollo Ridsdale, he stood on the other side of the piano looking at Lottie with a gaze which seemed to go through and through her. It meant, in fact, at once the real enthusiasm of a man who knew exactly what such talent was worth, and the less practical but still genuine enthusiasm of the amateur who knew what the music was worth as well as the voice. In the one point of view he saw Lottie's defects, in the other he saw all that could be made of her. An English prima donna! a real native talent as good as anything that ever came out of Italy, and capable of producing any amount of national enthusiasm! Rollo's eyes shone, his face lighted up, he did not know how

to express his delight. He said to himself that she would make "all our fortunes," with an exaggeration common to his kind. "I knew I was to be charmed, Miss Despard, but I did not know what delight was in store for me," he said, with eyes that said still more than his words. Lottie's eyes with their wonderful lashes sank before his. He thought it was perhaps a pretty trick to show that remarkable feature, and since he was sensible at all points to the beautiful, he did full justice to them. By Jove! how well she would look on the stage. Those eyelashes themselves! that pose! What a pensive Marguerite, what a Lucia she would make! He longed to rush up to town by the late train and rush upon his astonished partner, shouting, "I have found her!" "You will not deny me one more?" he said, turning to her with glowing eyes.

Poor silly Lottie! She grew crimson with pleasure and excitement, pale with excitement and feeling. What did she know about the young fellow's motives? She knew only that he had kept watch at her window, lounging about for a glimpse of her, a thing which to be sure explains itself; and that every note she sang seemed to make him happier and happier, and more and more adoring. The incense was delicious to her. She had never had it before (except perhaps from poor young Purcell—a nobody! what did he matter?), and the happiness of flattered vanity and soothed pride raised her to a pinnacle and climax of soft de-

light, such as she had never thought possible. It seemed almost more than Lottie could bear. Even Lady Caroline was so flattered by the plaudits addressed to her on the entertainment she had provided for her guests, that a sense of superior discrimination came over her placid mind, pleasantly exciting its tranquillity. "Yes, I knew that she was going to have a beautiful voice," she said. And she smiled, and accepted the thanks with an agreeable sense that she had deserved them. As for Rollo Ridsdale, it was he who got Miss Despard's shawl and wrapped her in it when the dreadful moment came, as he said, for her departure. "You have no carriage; you live on the other side of the way; then you must permit me to see you to your door," he said, "and to thank you once more for all the pleasure you have given me. This will be a white day in my recollection; I shall begin the dates in my history from the time when I first heard——"

"Mr. Ashford is going Miss Despard's way. And, Rollo, your aunt wants you, I think. We have all been so much delighted that we have forgotten the progress of time, and Lady Caroline is not very strong. Mr. Ashford," said the Dean, "I am sure we may leave to you the privilege of seeing Miss Despard to her own door."

*"And I am here,"* said the Signor. Nevertheless,

poor Lottie felt as if she had stepped suddenly out of heaven to earth again when she found herself between the musician and the minor canon outside the Deanery door.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LAW.

LAW went with his sister dutifully to the door in the great cloister. He did not care much for the honour and glory of going to the Deanery, but he was pleased to walk with Lottie in her pretty evening dress, with the roses in her hair. This gave him a certain gratification and sense of family pride, though he scoffed at that sentiment in general. Law did not feel that on the whole he had much to be proud of. Still, he was proud of Lottie, who was a creature quite out of the common, and like nobody else he had ever seen. He waited till the Deanery door was opened to her. That was a world of which Law knew nothing, and did not want to know anything. How Lottie had managed to get among these fine people, and why she liked to get among them, were equally strange to him. He admired her for the first, and wondered at her for the last. She was, at the present moment, the only lady belonging to the Chevaliers who had got footing in the Deanery; and this was just like Lottie, just what *he would have expected* from her, he said to himself; *but how she could stand* those old fogies, with their

pride and their finery, that was what he could not tell. All the same, it gave him a certain gratification to leave her there in her element among the great people. And when the door closed upon him Law went off about his own business. He went through the cloister, and a curious little back cloister beyond—for there were many intricacies about the Abbey, the different degrees of the hierarchy being very distinct, one cloister for the Chapter, another for the Minor people, and a third for the lay clerks. He went through the little square of the minor cloister, and came out upon a stone staircase which abridged the slopes of St. Michael's Hill, and led straight down into the town. The lights had begun to be lighted in the picturesque street which wound round the foot of the hill; they twinkled here and there in the shops opposite, and appeared in glimmers in the villages across the river. The dim misty plain lying doubly broad in the twilight, stretching out vaguely to the sky, was here and there defined by one of those twinkles which showed where a group of houses stood together. The town was all out in the streets, and on the river this lovely evening: boats floating dimly about the stream, people walking vaguely up and down the hill. And the air was filled with pleasant soft, uncertain sounds of talking, of footsteps, now and then the clocks chiming or striking, and a bugle sounding faint and far from where the soldiers were quartered, for there was

military depôt not far off. Law stopped at the head of the Steps, as they were called, and looked down over all this scene. The mere notion of being out in the *grand air*, as the French call it, with somehow a fuller sense of space and width than we can find a word for, was pleasant to Law; but if he paused, it was neither to enjoy the picture before him, nor was it because he had no definite place to go to. He knew very well where he was going. No vagueness on that point was in his mind; and he did not care a brass farthing for the landscape; but he paused at the head of the Steps and looked about, just as a child will pause before eating his cake, a pause of anticipation and spiritual enjoyment of the dainty before it goes to his lips. Then he ran down the Steps three at a time, skimming down the long flights, turning the corners like a bird. To take care of his sister had been duty, but Law was about his own business now.

What was Law's business? In all St. Michael's there was not a more idle boy. He was over eighteen, and he did nothing. Vague hopes that he would get ome appointment—that something would turn up for im—that he would suddenly awake and find himself an office somehow, doing something and making oney—had been in his own mind and that of his nily all his life. Law had no objection. Had some *taken him and set him* down at once in any *it was quite possible* that he might have done

the best he could in his place, and succeeded as well as most men; but in the meantime there were a great many preliminaries to go through, for which Law had never been required or encouraged to fit himself. In these days of examination, when the pitifullest little bit of an office builds up those prickly thorns, those red-hot ploughshares before its door, how was he to get into any office without education? He had spent all his earlier years, as has been seen, in eluding school as cleverly as possible, and doing as little as he could of his lessons; and now here he was on the verge of manhood, with nothing to do and no great wish to do anything;—a great, straight, powerful young fellow, without any absolute aim or tendency to evil, but good for nothing, not capable of anything, with neither purpose nor object in his life. He could row very well when anyone would give him an oar. He was not amiss at cricket when anyone asked him to play. He could walk with any man, and had won a race or two, and was quite capable of competing for a high jump, or for throwing a cricket-ball, or any of those useful accomplishments; but as for anything else he was not capable. He hated books with that sincere and earnest hatred which seems possible only to those who know books to be the preliminary of everything—a peculiarity of this examining age. Never *before surely* was such a candid and thorough detesta*tion of the* tools of knowledge possible. Law knew

that no door could possibly open to him without them, and therefore he hated and despised them, illogically no doubt, but very cordially all the same; and so went drifting along upon the stream, not asking what was to become of him, never thinking much of the subject, though he suffered greatly from want of pocket-money, and would gladly have made some exertion from time to time to obtain that, had he known what to do.

This want of pocket-money is the grand drawback to the education or no education of the youths of the nineteenth century. So long as they can have enough of that, what a pleasant life is theirs! For it does you no particular harm to be supposed to be "working for an examination" so long as you don't work much for that, and are exempted, for the sake of it, from all other kinds of work. Boating and cricketing and running races, and every kind of exercise, are known now-a-days to be compatible with the hardest mental labour, and he is a stern parent indeed who interferes with his son's training in such essential points. But all these delights are more or less dependent upon pocket-money. Law, whose bread and cheese had never yet failed, and whose conscience was not active, would have found his life quite pleasant but for that; but it was hard upon him not to be able to pay his subscription *to a cricket club, nor the* hire of a boat, nor even *the entry money for a race*, though that was sure to

repay itself abundantly if he won it. This was very hard upon him, and often stimulated him to the length of a resolution that he would work to-morrow and conquer all his subjects, and "scrape through" by sheer force of will, so as to have an income of his own. But the habit of idleness unfortunately overcame the resolution next morning, which was a pity, and Law "loafed," as he himself said, not being able to afford to "do anything." It is needless to inform the instructed who have to do with youths working for examinations, that it is cricket and boating and athletics these heroes mean when they talk of "having something to do."

Law, however, had a pleasure before him which had no connection with pocket-money. He went straight down with the directness of habit, till he came to a lane very tortuous and narrow, crowded with builders'-yards and coal-merchants, and affording glimpses of the little wharves where a little traffic was carried on, edging the river. Threading his way through them, he came to a red brick house, the front of which overhung the stream with its projecting gable. Law went in through a door which stood open always, and showed signs of much and constant use. There were lodgings upstairs, which were very pleasant in summer, and which were always let, and made a very comfortable item in the earnings of the family; but it *was not upstairs* that Law went, though that would *have done him* good. On the first floor, in the room

with the square window, which overlooked and indeed overhung the river, the excellent curate was living with whom Law occasionally "read," and to whom no doubt he would have said he was going had Lottie seen him at this door. But Law had no intention of disturbing the curate, who for his part did not want his pupil. He passed the staircase altogether, and pushed open a green baize door, beyond which was a short passage leading into a room, all ablaze with gas. The door of the room was wide open, and so were the windows, to admit all the air that was possible, and round the large table between sat three or four young women working and talking. They were very busy; the great table was covered with silk and muslin, and all kinds of flimsy trimming, and though they chatted they were working as for bare life. As Law sauntered in they all looked up for a moment, and threw a smile or a nod or half-a-dozen words at him, but scarcely intermitted a stitch. "We're awful busy; we can't so much as look at you; we've got some wedding things to finish for to-morrow," said one fair-haired girl who seemed specially to appropriate his visit. She pushed her chair a little aside without pausing in her work, as if accustomed to make room for him; and Law took a chair and placed it sideways, so that he could lean his idle elbow on the table between this busy needlewoman and the *rest. Perhaps as a* stormy sea gives zest to *the enjoyment of tranquillity* on shore, so the extreme

occupation of this workroom made him feel his own absolute leisure more delightful.

"Who is going to be married?" he said.

"Oh, you know just as well as I do. I am sure you have heard us talking of it for the last week. Polly, didn't you tell Mr. Despard all about it? It's a lady you know. It's Miss Hare at the Golden Eagle, who is one of your papa's great friends. I don't know what the Captain will do when she's gone. Polly, do you?"

"I don't know what the Captain has to do with her, nor me neither," said the young lady at the head of the table. The rest of the girls were sisters, with fair frizzy locks a little out of order after the long day's work, what with the warmth of the room, and the fluttering of the faint breeze from the river that ruffled the well-crimped tresses. But Polly was of a different stamp. She had a mountain of dark brown hair upon her head in plaits and curls and puffs innumerable, and though she was sallow in complexion, had commanding features, a grand aquiline nose, and brilliant eyes. "The Captain nor me, we hav'nt much to say to that sort," said Polly. "I don't go with them that has a word and a laugh for everybody. What I like is a young lady that respects herself. If you work for your living, that's not to say that you ain't as good *as the best of* them. Stick up for yourself, and other *folks will think* of you according, that's what I say."

"I am sure Miss Hare always sticks up for herself," said the girl by Law's side. "Going to be married in a veil, like one of the quality!"

"And so would I, if it was me," cried Polly. "The quality! What are they better than us, only they've got a pocketful of money. If I was the Queen, I'd do away with them all. I'd be the Queen, and all the rest should be the people. There shouldn't be one more than another, or one greater than another, only me. And then shouldn't I do whatever I pleased, and cut off their heads if they said a word!"

This instinctive perception of the secret of despotism made Law laugh, who thought he knew a great deal better. "It would be a funny world with Queen Polly over it," he said. "I hope you'd take me for your prime minister."

Polly gave him a look of saucy malice. "I'd take the Captain," she said.

"Has he been here to-night, Emma? I think he's always coming here," said Law, under his breath. It was a kind of growl which the young fellow gave out when he spoke low, in the voice which not very long ago had been treble, a soprano, as clear and pure as Lottie's—but it was extremely bass now.

"He wants to know," said Emma, with a glance at the others *as she pinned* her work straight, "if the *Captain has been here;*" upon which there was a

chorus of laughter, making Law red and angry. He turned upon them with a furious look.

"I should like to know how you would all like it," said the boy, "if your governor were to come poking in the very same place where——"

"Oh, you may make yourself quite easy, Mr. Lawrence," said Polly, with a toss of her elaborately dressed head. "He don't meddle with you. The Captain is a man of taste, he ain't a boy, like some folks. He knows what's what, the Captain does. Other girls may have their fancies; I don't say anything against that, but give me a man as knows the world, and knows what he wants. That's the sort for me."

"She gets more insufferable than ever. I wonder how you can put up with her," said Law under his breath.

"Doesn't she," said Emma in a whisper. "I wish she had never come into our workroom; but she has taste, mother says, and we have to put up with it. Everything has to give way to the work," the girl added, threading her needle; and as she made a knot upon the end of the new thread, she shook her head with a sigh.

Everything has to give way to the work! Law could not but smile, feeling the superiority of his gentlemanhood. With him it was the work that gave way to everything. "Poor little Em!" he said, with a little laugh. She was only seventeen, a year younger

than he was; her forefinger was seamed into furrows with her needle, and sometimes bled, which called forth no sympathy, but only scoldings, from the forewoman or her mother, when an unlucky red mark appeared on a hem. Emma did not very much mind the scoldings, which came natural to her, and she never made any comparison of herself with Law. He was a *gentleman*, that made all the difference. And it was a great deal nicer, and much more important, to have such a fine fellow to keep company with, than a young painter or carpenter, or even a tailor, which was what 'Liza had to be content with. Mr. Despard was a very different sort of person. As Law whispered to her, Emma felt her heart swell with pride. She went on with her work all the same, sometimes threatening to prick him with the needle which was at the end of that long thread. Emma was only "running a skirt," not trusted as yet with the more difficult parts of the work, and she pointed her needle at Law's nose when he came too close. But it was very sweet to her to have him there. Polly might brag as she pleased of the Captain—the Captain was old, and what was the good of him? He did nothing but puff Polly up with pride, the younger girls thought, and nothing would ever come of it. But Law was young, and there was no telling what might come of that. Emma threatened him with her needle, but in her heart was very proud of him. And there he sat and talked to her, while

Lottie was having her little triumph among all the fine people at the Rectory. The Welting girls were all pleased to have Law there. They liked to talk of Mr. Despard, "from the Abbey," and how they "could not keep him out of their workroom." By and by they began to joke about his idleness, the only idle one among so busy a company. "Can't you give him something simple to do—a skirt to run up or a long hem?" "Oh, yes," said Emma. "Do, Polly, he bothers me so I can't get my skirt done." Polly opened her drawer, and drew out from it the current number of a distinguished periodical, which all these young women admired.

"I'll tell you what he can do," she said, "and make himself useful—for we've got to sit up all night a'most, and there's nothing makes work go like reading out loud. Mr. Lawrence, if you want to be as good as your professions, and help us young ladies on, as are far harder worked than the like of you knows of even, there's the last number of the *Family Herald*, and we're all that anxious, we don't know how to bear it, to hear how Lady Araminta got on——"

"Oh, give it me," said Emma, with her eyes sparkling. "Oh, give it me! Oh, you nasty cruel creature, to have it in your drawer all the time, and never to tell!"

"I'll give it to Mr. Despard," said Polly, "and we'll all be done half as soon again if he'll read it out loud."

"Give it here," said Law with lordly good-nature, and he began at once upon his task. How the needles flew as he read! Lady Araminta was a wonderful heroine. She wore nothing less than velvet and satin, and carried her diamonds about with her wherever she went, and the title deeds of her estate in the bosom of her dress. Law leaned his long arm on the table, sometimes pausing to take breath and playing with Emma's pins and cotton. He would thus tantalise them now and then when the story grew most exciting and his auditors most breathless. He was *bon prince* among them all, very good-natured and willing to please them, though Emma had his special vows. His head was not so much turned as was the head of virtuous Lottie, listening to the applause of Mr. Rollo Ridsdale, but he was very happy with this little court about him all the same.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A NEW LIGHT.

It was late before Law got home. In the first place he read the *Family Herald* through to his interested and busy auditors. Their needles flew like lightning along the lengthy seams; trimmings were as nothing to them, and even a hem became interesting as he read. When he had pursued Lady Araminta to the end of this little portion of her history, showing how she refused that wicked Duke who was at the bottom of all her troubles, and whose expedients to get her into his power were so manifold, he began the next story—and so on till all was finished. It took some time to get through the delightful pennyworth. What good it did to the poor girls at their work! They were not patient, superior, noble-minded needlewomen, pensively bearing up against the privations of their lot, but very commonplace girls, grumbling at their privations frankly, yet sitting up half the night over wedding finery or funeral robes, without any very clear idea that it was a hardship, or indeed more than an inevitable feature of "the dressmaking." It was under this simple matter-of-fact aspect that their vigil

appeared to them now, and they did not feel it any very great grievance; but, such as it was, it was infinitely lightened by Law and the *Family Herald.* He was, to tell the truth, a little bit interested himself in the stories. He thought them very finely written. He liked the bits about Araminta's true, but alas! poor and unfortunate lover. This lover was tall and strong, interesting and clever beyond description. He could do whatever he tried to do, and managed to live comfortably upon nothing at all. Law had a half notion that this elegant and perfect being was like himself. He would not have breathed it to anyone, but yet he thought so. And when one story was finished he began another. He did not mind whether it was the beginning, or the middle, or the end of the tale; all was the same to Law; he went stoutly on, and read the whole number through—poetry, answers to correspondents, and all. It was not very fine literature perhaps, or, rather, it was very superfine literature, with nobody below the rank of a baronet in the leading stories; but what it did for these poor dressmaking girls! They followed Lady Araminta through every turn of her wonderful fortunes, with eyes that glowed and shone over their needlework. They identified themselves with her, exclaiming, "That's just what I'd have done!" and, "No, I wouldn't have had him, not I, if he'd been fifty dukes!" with true enthusiasm. Their needles flew, and the work got on as by magic;

their excitement showing itself in the speed with which they worked. The wedding things were done an hour sooner than they would otherwise have been done, under this stimulus, and it was little more than twelve o'clock when Polly, after folding up the last dress, in readiness to be sent home first thing in the morning, said, "Now, Mr. Lawrence, you've been a deal of use. If you like, you can see me home!"

"As if it was a treat for him to see her home!" Emma cried, who owned the special allegiance of Law; but the youth for his part had no objection. It was a beautiful night, and a little additional walk was nothing but a pleasure to him; and he was quite good-natured, ready to exert himself in any way that was not legitimate and necessary. Emma, indeed, did not smile upon this undertaking. She (who had been obliged to do as much before now without anyone to take care of her) did not see what Polly wanted with an escort in a quiet place like St. Michael's. "You'll meet nobody worse than the policeman," she said.

"Policemen are bad enough, sometimes," said Polly.

"Mind you don't meet the Captain," said Emma's elder sister, "and get him into trouble with his papa."

At this Polly laughed, tossing her head with its innumerable plaits and puffs. "I hope I can manage the Captain," she said. And whoever had heard the style of Polly's conversation as she walked up the

sweep of the steep street by Law's side, with the soft night air blowing in their faces, would have recognised at once the superiority of Polly to all the insinuations addressed to her. All was very quiet in the High Street of St. Michael's: they met nobody worse than the policeman, as Emma had suggested; and everything was still and dark, except the stars shining far away overhead; for the shop-windows had long been closed, and the lamps glimmered few and far between.

"You mustn't think anything of what these foolish things say about the Captain," said Polly; "because I'm a bit more reasonable than the rest, he likes to have a chat with me now and again. He's a very well-informed man is your papa; but you mustn't think nothing of what they say——"

"Oh, I don't!" said Law, with the serenest confidence; "I know the governor's way."

This, however, was not a reply which pleased Polly. "What do you mean by the governor's way?" she cried sharply. "You are not half respectful enough, if you would like to hear my opinion. You shouldn't talk of the Captain like that; he's a fine man, and he's one that many in this town thinks a deal of."

"Is he really?" said Law, in genuine surprise; "I did not know that. I wonder what kind of people they are? Is it far off where you live, Polly? I haven't got a latchkey, so I don't want to be very late."

"You never thought of being late so long as you

were sitting by Emma; though what you can see in a little white-haired thing like that, like a white cat! You haven't got a latchkey? I should think not at your age. Mr. Lawrence, take my advice, and never be so late out of bed unless there is a very good reason for it."

"I like that!" cried Law, "when it was you that kept me there all the time."

"I thought it would do you good," said Polly. "I am almost sure you had not done a thing besides, or looked into a book for the whole day."

"Oh! I should not mind standing an examination in the *Family Herald*," Law said with a laugh. He had occupied the post of reader in the workroom before, and knew a great deal about Lady Araminta. There could not be any doubt that he was very good-natured, and ready to make himself of use.

"I should like to know," said Polly—and though he could scarcely see her face, Law felt, with a mixture of amusement and indignation, by the sound of her voice, that Polly, too, meant to give him good advice —"I should like to know, Mr. Lawrence, what you intend to be? Are you going into the army, like the Captain? If I were a young gentleman, that's what I should choose above everything."

"I can't afford the army, worse luck," cried Law, "we haven't got any money, and a fellow can't live on his pay. And there's those dash'd examinations to pass everywhere before you can get into anything;

enough to drive a man out of his senses. I sometimes think I shall emigrate—that's the only thing you can do without an examination."

"But you can't do that without money—a little money at least," said Polly. "If I were you, I should make a push and get in somewhere. I can't think how you can stay at home doing nothing, a great strong young man like you."

"Oh! as for being strong, that don't do much for an exam.," said Law. "The little fellows stand the best chance there."

"I wouldn't make jokes about it, if I were you. I wonder how you can go on living on the Captain, and such a burden on him—both you and your sister——"

"Hallo," said Law in extreme surprise. The mention of Lottie bewildered him. He was not even angry for the moment—he was so profoundly astonished.

"Yes, indeed, you and your sister too. You don't show any consideration for the Captain, and how can you expect that he's always to be thinking of you? The Captain is a young man still, and he is a fine man, and if he were to marry again, as would be very natural at his age, where would you and Miss Despard be?"

"Let my sister alone, if you please," said Law, with a momentary flash of anger; and then he relapsed into a laugh. "The governor should be much obliged to you, Polly, for taking his part."

"Somebody ought to take his part," said Polly. "I don't suppose he's much over fifty—what I call quite a young man still; and why should he deny himself and spend all he's got on two grown-up young people that ought to be making their own living? A man like the Captain, he wants his ease and his little comforts and a wife to look after him—that's what he wants. He ain't an old man to give in to his family. If I were to put upon my folks like that, do you think I'd be walking up St. Michael's Hill at this hour of the night, after slaving and stitching all day? Not a bit of it, Mr. Lawrence. If I were to do as you're doing, I might sit at home and make myself comfortable; but I was always one for being independent, and as for the Captain, poor dear! he oughtn't to be spending his money upon them that can do for themselves. It is himself he ought to be thinking of, to get all the pleasure he can as long as he's able to enjoy it. And if he were to marry again, as there's nothing more likely, where would you and Miss Lottie be? Oh, yes, I know your names quite well," said Polly. "We often talk about you. These sort of names for short are a mistake. For instance me, my name's Maria, that's a very lady-like name; but what does it matter when everybody calls me Polly? but, if my name's common, nobody can say of me that I don't behave handsome to my parents," Polly said with emphasis. As for Law, he had felt himself growing hot and cold all through this

speech. It plunged him into an entirely new world of thought. He tried to laugh, but there was no laughter in his mind.

"It is very kind of you, Polly," he said, with scorn in his voice, "to take the trouble to give me so much good advice."

"Oh, I assure you it's not for your sake, but the Captain's," said Polly. "I told him if ever I had a chance with either of you, you should hear a bit of my mind—and I saw my opportunity to-night—that's why I asked you to come with me, Mr. Lawrence. Oh, it wasn't for the pleasure of your society! I told the Captain I'd give you a bit of my mind. This is my home, so I'll bid you good-night, and I hope you'll lay to heart what I say."

Law turned up the Abbey Hill when thus dismissed with much secret excitement in his mind. It was altogether a new idea to him that his father was as Polly said, quite a young man still, and that it was on himself, not on his grown-up children, that his money should be spent. Law had never looked upon the income of the family as belonging exclusively to his father. It *was* the family income, and it had seemed to him that he had just as good a right to have everything he wanted as his father had. As a matter of fact he did not get all he wanted, as Captain Despard managed to do; but that was because his father had the command of everything, not that he

had a better right to it than Law. The idea that he had no right at all, as Polly seemed to think, and that his father might make the home untenable by marrying somebody, perhaps Polly herself, struck him as the most extraordinary of revelations. It was too extraordinary to be thought of calmly—his brain boiled and bubbled with the extraordinariness and novelty of the thought. The governor, who was only not an old fogey because he was so much less respectable, less orderly than old fogeys ought to be!—Law could not associate his father's image with the idea of, even, comparative youth. But he could not dismiss the suggestion from his mind. He tried to laugh, but something seemed to hang over him like a threat, like a cloud of evil omen. He walked quickly up the slope to the Abbey gate, trying to shake off the uneasy feeling in his mind—trying to postpone at least the new idea which he could not get rid of. When, however, Law had got into the Precincts he saw a passenger not much less active and considerably more jaunty than himself on the way before him, walking with a slight occasional lurch, up the pavement to the Lodges. The lurch was quite slight, and might not have been noticed by an indifferent eye, but Law noted it with the jealous observation of one whose own credit was at stake. It was hard upon a fellow, he thought, that his *father should* be seen going home night after night *with a lurch in* his walk, and that his name should be

recognised in all the lowest quarters of the town as that of "the Captain's son." Why should he suffer for such a cause? Other old men were respectable, were no shame to their sons, but on the contrary furnished a margin of honour and reputation upon which to draw when there was occasion; but this was not the case with Captain Despard. Other old men—but there suddenly flashed across Law's mind as he instinctively placed his father in this class, a recollection of the words which had just been said to him—"He is what I call a young man still." Pricked by this thought, he looked at the figure before him with eyes suddenly cleared from the mists of habit and tradition, and saw it in an altogether new light. Captain Despard was straight and active: he carried his head high, and his step, though to-night slightly irregular, was both firm and light. To see him walking in front humming and whistling by turns, perhaps with a certain bravado to show how steady he was, gave Law the most uncomfortable sensation. It was true what Polly had said. This was no old fogey, no heavy father; though up to this moment Law had looked upon the Captain in no other light. He felt a shiver come over him, a sudden realisation of all the possibilities. Who should say that the governor ought not to do what he liked best, whatever that might be? Law felt conscious that he himself, *who was so much* younger, did what he liked *in indifference to* everybody's opinion, and he was

under no affectionate delusion as to the superior virtue of his father. What if Polly were right? Polly perhaps had a better chance of knowing the Captain's wishes than either his son or his daughter, to whom he was not likely to talk on such subjects. A chill came over the lad though the night was so warm. Life had always seemed sure enough to him, though it had its privations. He had to put up with that chronic want of pocket-money—and with frequent "rows" from his father, and passionate remonstrances from Lottie. These were the drawbacks of existence; but Law was aware that, except in very favourable circumstances indeed, as when you were born a duke, or at least born to the possession of five thousand a year or so, existence was very seldom without drawbacks; this, however, was very much worse than the want of pocket-money; the governor with a new wife, perhaps Polly! The situation was too horrible to be realised, but for the moment the idea seemed to pour a current of ice into Law's veins.

He had no latchkey, but as soon as he saw his father he made up his mind to take advantage of Captain Despard's entrance in a way which he had found practicable before this. Light and swift as he was, when the Captain had fumbled and opened the door, Law stole close behind him and entered with him in the darkness. "What's that?" Captain Despard growled, feeling the movement of the air as his son

passed. "I'll swear there's a ghost in this house," he added, grumbling to himself. Law, however, was safely out of the way before his father managed to strike a light, and went, swaying from side to side, up the narrow staircase which creaked under him. The young fellow, standing back in the darkness, saw Captain Despard's face illuminated by the light of the candle he carried, and gazed at it with eyes sharpened by anxiety. It was a handsome face—the contour still perfect, the hair crisp and curling, a heavy military moustache shadowing the well-formed lip. The Captain was flushed, his eyes were blinking, half-closed, and that unloveliest look that can be seen on a man's face, the look of partial intoxication approaching the sleepy stage, took all spirit and sentiment from him. Yet Law could not but acknowledge that his father was a handsome man. He stood quite still, watching that progress upstairs, half because he was unwilling to be seen, half because he was anxious to see. Captain Despard was "a fine man," as Polly had said. Law could see now, looking at him between the bars of the railing which guarded the little staircase, that there was nothing in common between him and the old white-haired Chevaliers, old men not strong enough to be warlike, but courteous and gentle as becomes old soldiers, who sunned themselves on the pavement before the Lodges. Captain Despard, middle-aged and self-assertive, was as different as

possible from those old gentlemen with their honourable scars. He had none of their honours nor of the grace of old service; but he was strong in life and vigour, a kind of superiority which Law could appreciate. A grain of pride mingled in the exasperation with which he acknowledged this to himself—and yet he was not only exasperated but alarmed. He retired to bed very softly afterwards, creeping on tiptoe and in the dark up the stairs. There was still a gleam of light under Lottie's door, but Law preferred not to direct his sister's attention to the late hour of his own return by going straight to her room to relieve himself of his trouble. He did not want to be forced into confidences or to betray where he had himself been, and how he had heard the alarming prophecies which had so suddenly cleared his sight; and though the temptation was great he resisted it. Thus the lights were burning all at once in three of the little rooms in Captain Despard's house, each illuminating a separate world of excitement, unsuspected by the others. The Captain's share of the disturbance was less of the mind than the body. He had lost some money which he could not afford to lose, and was annoyed on this account; and he was excited, but more sleepy, on account of the potations which had accompanied his play. "By——, I'll have it back to-morrow night—luck can't be so against me one night after another." This was the only burden of his

simple and uncomplicated reflections. He thought nothing of his children one way or another. Both his children, however, though in different ways, were thinking of him. Lottie, though she dared not openly sit up for her father, remained up in her own room until he came in, and she had made sure that he did not want anything, and was not likely to set the house on fire. But Law's reflections were more serious than those of the other two. It seemed to the idle lad as if suddenly a real burden had got on to his shoulders. He was thoroughly frightened out of the pleasant calm of nature—the sense that everything must go on as everything had gone since he could remember. In later days, indeed, things had gone better for Law —Lottie had managed now and then to scrape a shilling or two off the housekeeping to give him, and of late she had not bullied him quite so much as usual. The current had been flowing more evenly—everything had conspired to make the happy-go-lucky of his life more smooth than before. He woke up with all the more fright and surprise to the sudden danger now.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TRIUMPH AND TERROR.

LOTTIE had gone home that night, it need not be said, with her head full of excitement. Had she not good reason to look upon this evening as of importance in her life? She had met the man who, before he had ever spoken to her, had, according to all appearances, placed her on the highest pinnacle on which a girl can be placed—the throne of a romantic love. Though it had been a temporary downfall to her to be placed in the charge of Mr. Ashford and the Signor, instead of crossing the Dean's Walk in the company of this secret and poetical lover, yet she was almost glad to be thus let drop into quietness, to avert any word or look too much, which might have spoiled the visionary elevation on which she felt herself. Yes, she was glad that they had never been alone. Had he whispered an avowal of any kind in her ear, she was not, she knew, prepared for it; Lottie was honest even in her self-delusion, and she knew that, however profoundly to her advantage it might be, she could not make any response to a man whom she *did not* know, whom she was speaking to for the

time, notwithstanding her consciousness that he must have been thinking of her for a long time. She could not have made any fit reply. She must have said something which probably would have hurt him in the fervour of his romantic passion; for, though grateful to him and romantically touched by his evident devotion, Lottie could not have persuaded herself that he was anything to her except a delightful wonder and most flattering novelty. No, it was better, much better, that he did not come; she must have hurt his feelings, discouraged him, probably driven him away from her; and she was very far from wishing to drive him away. Lottie thought, with an innocent calculation, if she saw a little more of him, had a little time given her to make his acquaintance, that probably she would come to love him quite naturally and spontaneously; but at present it was not possible that she could do so, and she felt a natural shrinking from any premature disclosure of his feelings. Thus it was evidently most fortunate that the Dean had interposed, that Rollo had not been allowed to come home with her—fortunate, and yet a little disappointing too. There had been a very few words exchanged with her companions as they crossed the Dean's Walk. Mr. Ashford had most kindly and courteously reminded her that she had expressed a wish to speak to him about something. "It is too late now to ask what it was," he said; "I must not keep you out of doors at this hour;

but if you will permit me, I will call and inquire in what way I can be of use to you?" "You know in what way *I* would like to be of use to you, Miss Despard," the Signor said on the other side. All this was very flattering, even though she might be displeased by the Signor's reiteration of his disagreeable offer. She made him a curtsey like Lady Caroline, while to the minor canon she gave her hand, which perhaps was quite sufficient to mark her different estimation of them. And indeed the Signor had been very kind about the accompaniments, which he had certainly played to perfection. This recollection came to her mind as he thanked her for her singing, undaunted by the stiffness of her leave-taking. "Indeed, I owe you more, a great deal more, than you can possibly owe me," Lottie said, with a burst of compunction; "I never sang so well before, because I never had such an accompaniment." "Then I hope I may accompany you very often again," he said, with a smile, as he went away. Thus even with the Signor, Lottie felt herself in perfect good-humour and charity. A man who paid such compliments to her voice, how could she be hard upon him, even if he made a little mistake in respect to her position? And she went in out of the summer night in a state of celestial satisfaction with all the people surrounding *her—and herself.* Even Lady Caroline had melted *into something* which was warmth for her. She had

said, "I have enjoyed your singing very much, Miss Despard," and had touched Lottie's hand with two limp fingers—that was something, indeed it was much for Lady Caroline. And all the other great ladies had spoken, or at least had smiled upon Lottie, thanking her. What could she have wished for more? She went up into her little tiny room, which was not much bigger than Lady Caroline's grand piano, and throwing off the Indian shawl (if Mrs. O'Shaughnessy could but have seen it!) on the floor, sat down upon her little white bed and began to think. To think! nothing of the sort—to go over everything that had happened, with a dazzle of light and delight and triumph round her. She seemed to herself to have thrown down all the boundaries that had hitherto separated her from her lawful sphere. If a suitor should come from that higher and better world who could wonder now? Had she not been adopted into it—received to her just place at last?

And naturally it was upon Rollo that her recollections chiefly centred; he was the chief figure of the whole company to Lottie. She remembered minutely everything he had said and done, the expression of his face (though she put infinitely more meaning in it than was there), the tone of his voice. How the room had become at once full of interest, of excitement, when he *came in, clearing* away all the dimness! Lottie *had scarcely time even to* wonder how and where

their next meeting would be, for thinking of this first meeting. How his face had lighted up when he saw that she was there; how he had been caught by some one on his way to her, and kept talking in spite of himself, with his eyes upon her all the time; how he had escaped and pressed through all the fine company to get to her side; how he had confessed that he had but a very visionary right to claim her acquaintance at all, but nevertheless meant to stand on that right as, for the time being, the son of the house! Lottie had scarcely forgotten a word of all he said. And, as a matter of fact, Rollo had been very careful to behave himself with due discretion, not to make it too apparent that her voice was the thing that most interested him. She thought that he admired her singing as a part of his enthusiasm for herself. She had not a suspicion of the real state of the case. It seemed to her that her voice was a delightful discovery to him, a something *pardessus le marché*, an added charm; that it was the sole foundation of his apparent enthusiasm never occurred to the girl; neither, though she knew that her general triumph was caused by her singing, did she solely set down to that cause the friendly looks and smiles and flattering compliments she had received. This was absurd, but we do not pretend that Lottie was beyond the reach of absurdity. She knew that it was her singing which had suddenly silenced all the conversation going on in the room, and called the at-

tention of everybody; but yet it was surely something more; it was herself, not her voice, which brought that kindly look to their eyes as they smiled upon her. It is hard to acknowledge to ourselves that it is for some special, perhaps accidental, quality we may possess, that we are favoured and esteemed by our fellow-creatures. Human nature is humbled by the conviction that it is the possession of a gift worthy of popularity which makes an individual popular. We all prefer to be prized for nothing at all, for ourselves. And this, in the face of circumstances, and clean against all reason, was what Lottie hoped and determinedly believed. She could not consent to the other idea. To be praised and made friends with *for her voice* was intolerable. The only approbation which is really flattering and delightful is that which is given upon no ground at all.

She had been sitting thus for some time on her bed, musing, with eyes that sparkled and a heart that fluttered with happiness; and had taken off her evening gown, and loosed the roses from her hair, and wrapped her white shining satin shoulders in a white cotton dressing-gown; and had even brushed out those long dark locks, and twisted them up again close to her head for the night, with innumerable fancies twisted out and in of all she did, before Captain Despard, fumbling for the key-hole, opened his own door and came in, in the dark. It was Lottie's habit to sit

up till he came in, but to-night she had been too much occupied by her own concerns to hear his approach, and it was only when he came upstairs that she woke up to think of him. Lottie's experienced ear caught the lurch in his step, just as Law's experienced eye had caught it. "Again!" she said to herself, with a momentary flash of anger; but it did not make her wretched as it might have done a more sensitive daughter. Lottie was accustomed to accept her father without question, not expecting much of him, and somewhat disposed, when he did not come up even to the little she expected, to satisfy herself that it was just like papa. But his entrance relieved her from her habitual vigil. She heard Law steal upstairs afterwards, and wondered how or when he had got in, and where he went at night, with more curiosity than she expended on her father; but even that did not much disturb Lottie, who had been used all her life to irregular entrances and exits. After a while all was still in the little house, notwithstanding the anxieties and excitements collected under its roof. Disquietude and trouble could not keep Law from sleeping any more than excitement and triumph could keep his sister; and, as for the Captain, the sleep of the just was never so profound as that which wrapped him in a not too lovely tranquillity. The air was all thrilling with emotion of one kind or another, but they slept as profoundly as if they had not a care in the world—as

soundly as the good O'Shaughnessys next door, who had been asleep since eleven o'clock, and who had no cares but those of their neighbours to disquiet them; or old Colonel Dalrymple on the other side, who dozed through his life. The soft night stilled them all, young and old and middle-aged, in their kind, just as it held in soft shadow the Abbey, with all its grey pinnacles and immemorial towers. Nature cared nothing for the troubles of life; but life submitted to the gentle yoke of nature, which relieves the soul, while it binds the body, and makes a temporary truce and armistice with all the army of mortal cares.

Next morning Law lounged into the little drawing-room after breakfast with a big book in his hand. He had almost given up the pretence of reading for some time, so that it was all the more wonderful to see a book which was not a yellow railway novel in his hand. Lottie had been up early, awakened by the commotion in her mind, which did not allow her to rest—or rather which prevented her from going to sleep again when the early noises of the morning woke her up. Accordingly she had got through a great deal of her ordinary household work by this time, when Law, after a breakfast which was later than usual, lounged in upon her. He was very big, and filled up the little room; and his habit of doing as little as possible, and his want of money, which made some imperfections in his toilet inevitable, gave him a look of indolence and

shabbiness such as was not natural to his age, or eve to his disposition, for by nature Law was not laz He came sauntering in with one hand in his pocke and with his book under the other arm; and he s down in the only easy-chair the room contained, e asperating Lottie, to whom his very bigness seemed a offence. There were times when she was proud Law's size, his somewhat heavy good-looks, his athleti powers; but this morning, as many times before, th very sight of those long limbs jarred upon her. Wh was the use of all that superfluous length and strength He took the only easy-chair, and stretched out his lon limbs half across the room, and Lottie at the heig of her activity felt impatience rise and swell withi her. She could not put up with Law that morning His indolence was an offence to her.

"What do you want, Law?" she said, in a voic which was not so sweet as it had been at the Deaner She gave a rapid glance up at him as she went o with her darning, and took in the whole picture, th easy-chair and the lounging attitude. If he had s upright upon the little hard wickerwork chair, Lotti would have felt more merciful.

"Well, I want nothing in particular, except to tal to you a little," said Law. "You need not be so cross.

"I am not cross; but to see you in an easy-chai *idling away* all the morning——"

"*How* do you know I've been idling this mornin

Look at my book: that's Virgil," said Law, looking at it with simple admiration. "I don't think a fellow could do much better than that."

"But have you *really* been reading?" Lottie's tone modified; she began to look at him with respect. "Oh, Law, if you only would work! it would make such a difference, it would make me quite happy. I was speaking to Mr. Ashford last night. You know Mr. Ashford, the minor canon. He is so clever with his pupils. If you could but go to him, if he would only take you, Law!"

"He would take me fast enough if we could afford the money. I say, Lottie, the governor was awfully late last night: did you hear him coming in? I want to tell you something about him—something I have heard."

"I think you were very late, too, Law."

"Oh! never mind about that; it does not matter about me. Lottie, listen. A friend—I mean somebody—was speaking to me about him. Did it ever come into your head that he was not an old man, and that such a thing was possible as that he might—it seems too ridiculous to say it—marry again?"

"Marry again? you are dreaming!" cried Lottie loudly, in her astonishment.

"Yes, while we knew nothing of it. After all, when you *come to think of it*, when you look at him, *you know, he is not so awfully* old. One thinks he

must be, because he is one's father. But some these old beggars are just as silly"—said Law in a struck tones, "and you can't stop them doing thi as you can a fellow that is young. It is an av shame! a fellow that is under age, as they call it, can pull him up, though there's no harm in him; an old fellow of fifty, you can't stop him, whate nonsense he may set his face to. That's what I he last night."

"It is not true. I don't believe a single word it," said Lottie. "You must have been in very stra company, Law," she added with severity, "to hear this gossip about papa."

Lottie did not mean to pass such a tremend sentence on her father; she spoke simply enough. hear this gossip her brother must have been in hat such as those that Captain Despard frequented. did not know what they were, but she knew they w evil; therefore she made use of this weapon insti tively, which she found, as it were, lying by her, meaning any censure upon her father, only a necess reproof to Law.

"You may say what you please about bad cc pany," he said, "but that's what I heard; that wasn't so old after all; and what would become of if he married again? It was not gossip. I beli really, though I was very angry at the time, that was meant kindly; it was meant for a warning. Y

would have thought so yourself, if you had been there."

"I do not believe a word of it," said Lottie; but she had grown pale. She did not ask again who had told him or where he had been; she set herself seriously to prove the thing to be false, which showed that she was not so sure of not believing it as she pretended to be. "It is all a falsehood," she went on. "Is papa a man to do that sort of thing? Marry! he would have to give us a great many things if he married. He could not afford to spend his money as he does; he would not be allowed to be always out in the evenings as he is now. Why, even poor mamma, she did not give in to him as we are obliged to do; he had to pay a little attention to her—sometimes. And now he has got more used to do what he likes than ever, and has more money to spend; do you think he would give up that *for a wife?*" cried Lottie with disdain. "It only shows that you don't know papa."

"Ah! but you don't know——" said Law. He was about to say "Polly," but stopped in time. "You don't know what might be put into his head, Lottie. He might be made to believe that to get rid of us would put all right. If he got rid of us, don't you see? he would want a woman in the house; and if it was some one he liked himself, that would make herself agreeable to him, and flatter him, and coddle him—that would please him better," said Law, with precocious

knowledge of a man's requirements, "than you, who are always trying to keep things straight but not to humour him, Lottie; or me—that am of no use at all."

Lottie grew paler and paler during this explanation. She had never humoured her father, it was true. She had made desperate exertions "to keep things straight," to recover the family credit, to pay the bills, to keep regular hours; but, with the hardihood of youth, she had not hesitated even to stint her father of a meal when it seemed to her impetuous determination to be necessary, and she had not flattered him, nor made his convenience the absolute rule of the household, as some girls would have been wise enough to do. Lottie had reflected that he kept the lion's share of the family income to himself, and was quite able to make up for any shortcomings in her bill of fare; and she had carried out her regulations with a high hand, feeling no compulsion upon her, no primary necessity to please her father. She perceived all this at a glance while Law spoke, and immediately felt herself confronting such a breach of all the ordinary usages of her life as made her shiver. What might he not do? turn them out suddenly from his doors, out upon the world, at any moment whenever he pleased. He had the power to do it whenever he pleased, whatever seemed to him good. She drew a long shivering *breath, feeling* as if all were over, as if already she *heard* the door clanging and barred behind her, as

was looking out penniless and destitute upon the world, not knowing where to go. Was it possible that such a fate was reserved for her? She became as white as her dress with that sudden panic of the imagination which is more terrible than any reality. Law was very anxious and alarmed also, but he had got over the worst on the previous night, and it gave him a kind of half pleasure to see how he had frightened Lottie; though, at the same time, the effect of his communication upon her deepened his own conviction of the danger about to overtake them. He leaned back in his easy-chair with a certain solemn satisfaction, and stretched his long legs farther across the room than ever.

"You see, Lottie," he said, "it is what I have told you before; you never would humour him. I don't say that he's not unreasonable, but he might never perhaps have dropped among those sort of people if you had laid yourself out to——"

Lottie sprang to her feet in a sudden gust of passion. She took Law by the shoulders, and with the sudden surprise of her assault got the better of him and turned him out of the chair. "You sit there, lolling all over the room," she cried, "and tell me my duty, you lazy, idle, useless boy! If papa turns you out, it will serve you right. You have a hundred things open to you; you have the whole world open to you; but you will not so much as take the trouble to pass

the door. You would like to be carried over all t ditches, to be set up on a throne, to have everythi and to do nothing. It will serve you right! A where do you get all this gossip about papa?" s went on. "Who are the sort of people you are spe ing your time with? You thought I did not know h late you came in last night. Where were you, La where are you always, all these long evenings? Y say you are going out, and you never mind that I sitting in the house all alone. You go somewhere, I I never hear that you have been with anybody—a body in our own class——"

"In our own class! I wonder what is our o class?" said Law, with a scornful sense of the we ness of the position. "Would you like me to tak hand in old O'Shaughnessy's rubber, or read papers to old Dalrymple? They are half as old ag as the governor himself. I suppose that's what y call my own class."

Lottie felt that she had laid herself open to def and the consciousness subdued her greatly. She down again on her little chair, and looked up at h as he stood leaning upon the door, red with indig tion at her onslaught. Lottie herself was flushed w the exertion and the shame of having thus afford *him an* opportunity for a scoff. She eluded the *lemma as* he proposed it, however, and flung her *back into* the larger question: "You are grown

she said, indignantly; "a great big boy, looking like a man. It is a disgrace to you to be dependent on papa. It would be a good thing for you, a very good thing, if he were to—marry, as you say, and cast you off, and force you to work for yourself. What else have I been saying to you for years?"

"And what would it be for you?" said Law, taking, she thought, an unkind advantage of her; "there are two of us to be considered. What would it be for you, Lottie, I should like to know? What could you do any more than I?"

He stood up against the door, with a provoking smile on his face, and his big book under his arm, taunting her with her helplessness, even Lottie felt, with her high notions, which made her helplessness all the worse. He smiled, looking down upon her from that serene height. "If the worst came to the worst," said Law, "I could always carry a hod or 'list for a soldier. I don't stand upon our class as you do. I haven't got a class. I don't mind if I take the shilling to-morrow. I have always thought it would be a jolly life."

Lottie gave a scream of horror, and flew upon him, seizing his coat collar with one hand, while she threatened him with her small nervous fist, at which Law laughed. "Will you dare to speak of 'listing to me," she said, flaming like a little fury; "you, an officer's son, and a gentleman born!" Then she broke

down, after so many varieties of excitement. "Oh Law, for the sake of Heaven, go to Mr. Ashford! I will get the money somehow," she said, in a broken voice melting into tears, through which her eyes shone doubly large and liquid. "Don't break my heart! I want you to be better than we are now, not worse Climb up as far, as far as you please, above us; but don't fall lower. Don't forget you are a gentleman unless you want to break my heart."

And then, in the overflow of feeling, she leaned her head upon his shoulder, which she had just gripped with fury, and cried. Law found this more embarrassing than her rage, at which he laughed. He was obliged to allow her to lean upon him, pushing his book out of the way, and his heart smote him for making Lottie unhappy. By this time it could not be said that he was unhappy himself. He had shuffled off his burden, such as it was, upon her shoulders. He shifted his book, and stood awkwardly enough, permitting her to lean upon him; but it cannot be said that he was much of a prop to his sister. He held himself so as to keep her off as far as possible. He was not unkind, but he was shy, and did not like to be placed in a position which savoured of the ridiculous. "I wish you wouldn't cry," he said, peevishly. "You girls always cry—and what's to be got by crying? I don't want to 'list if I can help it. I'd rather *be an* officer—but I can't be an officer; or get into

something; but I never was bred up to anything; and what can I do?"

"You can go to Mr. Ashford," said Lottie, feeling herself repulsed, and withdrawing from him with a glimmer of indignation relighted in her eyes. "I met him last night, and I spoke to him about you. He seems very kind. If you go to him, he will at least tell us whether he thinks you have a chance for anything. Oh, Law, now that you do see the necessity——"

"But it's a great deal more serious for you," said the lad, mischievously. He was not unkind, but it seemed something like fun to him to treat Lottie as she had treated him so often, holding up before him the terrors and horrors of his idleness. Because she was a girl, did that make any difference? She had just as good a right to be bullied as he had, and to be made to see how little she could do for herself. Emma, who was younger than Lottie, worked for her living, and why should not Lottie do the same? why should she be exempted? Thus Law reasoned, whom Lottie, it must be allowed, had never spared. He watched, with mischievous curiosity, making an experiment, not knowing whether it would be successful or not. But the way in which Lottie took it after this did not give Law the amusement he expected. She sat down again in her chair, taking no further notice of him and relapsed into her own thoughts when

he could not follow her. His own mind, however, ha recovered its elasticity; for, after all, if the worst cam to the worst, if the governor was such an ass as t marry Polly, it would not matter so very much to Law Something, there was no doubt, would turn up; or h would 'list—that was an alternative not to be despise He was tall enough for the Guards, among whom La had often heard a great many gentlemen were to b found; and the life was a jolly life—no bother abou books, and plenty of time for amusement. There wa nothing really in the circumstances to appal him no he had considered them fully. But it was a great dea more serious for Lottie. After all the bullying he ha endured at her hands, Law may perhaps be excuse if, in sheer thoughtlessness, he rather enjoyed th prospect of this turning of the tables upon his siste He wondered how she would like it when it came t her turn, she who was so ready to urge himself to th last limits of patience. He did not wish anything un pleasant to happen to her. He would not have ha her actually brought into contact with Polly, or place under her power. But that Lottie should "just se how she liked it herself" was pleasant to him. would not do her any real harm, and perhaps it woul teach her to feel for other people, and understand tha they did not like it either. A slight tinge of remors crossed Law's mind as he saw how pale and seriou she looked, sitting there thinking; but he shifted hi

Virgil to his other arm, and went away, steeling his heart against it. It would make her feel for other people in future. To have it brought home to herself would do her no harm.

## CHAPTER IX.

### VISITORS.

AND what a problem it was with which Lot Despard was thus left alone! The house was still, one moving in it—nothing to distract her thougl Now and then a swell of music from the Abbey, wh service was going on, swept in, filling the silence fo moment; but most of the inhabitants of the Lod were at matins, and all was very still in the sunshi the Dean's Walk lying broad and quiet, with scarc a shadow to break the light. Downstairs the li maid-of-all-work had closed the door of the kitchen, that her proceedings were inaudible. And the Capt as in duty bound, was in the Abbey, trolling forth responses in a fine baritone, as he might have d had they been the chorus of a song. Lottie sat lik statue in the midst of this stillness, her eyes abstract her mind absorbed. What a problem to occupy h Law, rustling over his books in his own room, g frightened as he thought of her. She would break heart; it would make her ill; it might almost kill h *he thought.* She sat with her work dropped on *knee, her* eyes fixed but not seeing anything; her

—what could occupy it but one reflection? the sudden possibility of a breaking up of all her traditions, an end of her young life—a dismal sudden survey of the means of maintaining herself, and where she could go to in case this unthought-of catastrophe should occur at once. Poor desolate Lottie, motherless, friendless, with no one to consult in such an emergency, no one to fly to! What could be more terrible than to be brought face to face with such an appalling change, unwarned, unprepared? What was she to do? where was she to go? Worse than an orphan, penniless, homeless, what would become of her? No wonder if despair was paramount in the poor girl's thoughts.

Well—but then despair was not paramount in her thoughts. She made a stand for a moment with wild panic before the sudden danger. What was it that was going to happen? Lottie gave a momentary gasp as a swimmer might do making the first plunge; and then, like the swimmer, lo! struck off with one quick movement into the sunshine and the smoothest gentle current. Change! the air was full of it, the world was full of it, the sky was beautiful with it, and her heart sprang to meet it. Do you think a girl of twenty on the verge of love, once left free to silence and musing, was likely to forget her own dreams in order to plunge into dark reveries as to what would happen to her if her *father married again?* Not Lottie, at least. She *launched herself indeed on* this subject, the corners of

her mouth dropping, a gleam of panic in her eyes; but something caught her midway. Ah! it was like the touch of a magician's wand. What did it matter to Lottie what might happen to other people; had not everything that was wonderful, everything that was beautiful, begun to happen to herself? She floated off insensibly into that delicious current of her own thoughts, losing herself in imaginary scenes and dialogues. She lost her look of terror without knowing it, a faint smile came upon her face, a faint colour, now heightening, now paling, went and came like breath. Sometimes she resumed her work, and her needle sped through her mending like the shuttle of the Fates; sometimes it dropped out of her hand altogether, and the work upon her knee. She lost count of time and of what she was doing. What was she doing? She was weaving a poem, a play, a romance, as she sat with her basket of stockings to darn. The *mise en scène* was varied, but the personages always the same; two personages—never any more; sometimes they only looked at each other, saying nothing; sometimes they talked for hours; and constantly in their talk they were approaching one subject, which something always occurred to postpone. This indefinite postponement of the explanation which, even in fiction, is a device which must be used sparingly, can be indulged in without stint in the private imagination, and Lottie in her romance took full advantage of it

power. She approached the borders of her *éclaircissement* a hundred times, and evaded it with the most delicate skill, feeling by instinct the superior charm of the vague and undecided, and how love itself loses its variety, its infinite novelty, and delightfulness, when it has declared and acknowledged itself. Law, in his room with his big book, comforting himself under the confused and painful study to which the shock of last night's suggestion had driven him by the idea that Lottie too must be as uncomfortable as himself, was as much mistaken as it was possible to imagine. His compunction and his satisfaction were equally thrown away. Still the feeling that he had startled her, and the hope that it would "do her good," gave him a little consolation in his reading, such as it was. And how difficult it was to read with the sun shining outside, and little puffs of soft delicious air coming in at his open window, and laying hands upon him, who shall say? He was comforted to think that next door to him, Lottie, with her basket of clothes to mend, patching and darning, must be very much disturbed too; but it would have been hard upon Law had he known that she had escaped from all this, and was meanly and treacherously enjoying herself in private gardens of fancy. He had his Emma to be sure—but of her and the very well-known scenes that enclosed her, *and all the matter-of-fact* circumstances around, he *felt no inclination to* dream. He liked to have her

by him, and for her sake submitted to the chatter of the workroom (which, on the whole, rather amused him in itself), and was quite willing to read the *Family Herald* aloud; but he did not dream of Emma as Lottie did of the incident which had happened in her career. It was true there was this fundamental difference between them, that Lottie's romance alone had any margin of the unknown and mysterious in it. About Emma there was nothing that was mysterious or unknown.

It was not likely, however, that these two young people in their two different rooms, Law gaping over his Virgil, and feeling his eyes wander after every fly that lighted on his book, and every bird that chirped in the deep foliage round the window; and Lottie with her needle and her scissors, thinking of everything in the world except what she was doing or what had just been told her, should be left undisturbed for long in these virtuous occupations. Very soon Law was stopped in the middle of a bigger yawn than usual by the sound of a step coming up the stairs, which distracted his not very seriously fixed attention—and Lottie woke up from the very middle of an imaginary conversation, to hear a mellow round voice calling her, as it came slowly panting upstairs. "Are you there then, Lottie, me honey? You'd never let me mount up to the top of the house, without telling me, if ye weren't there?" Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, like many of her country-

folks, was half aware of the bull she was uttering, and there was a sound of laughter in her voice. Lottie, however, sat still, making no sign, holding her needle suspended in her fingers, reluctant to have her pleasant thoughts disturbed by any arrival. But while the brother and sister, each behind a closed door, thus paused and listened, the Captain (audibly) coming home from morning service, stepped in after Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, and addressed the new-comer. "Lottie is in the drawing-room," he said, "though she does not answer. I am just going out again when I've fetched something—but I must first see you upstairs;" and then there was an interval of talking on the stairs and the little landing-place. Lottie made no movement for her part. She sat amidst her darnings, and awaited what was coming, feeling that her time for dreams was over. Captain Despard came lightly up, three steps at a time, after Mrs. O'Shaughnessy had panted to the drawing-room door. He was jaunty and gay as ever, in his well-brushed coat with a rosebud in his button-hole. Few, very few, days were there on which Captain Despard appeared without a flower in his coat. He managed to get them even in winter, no one could tell how. Sometimes a flaming red leaf from the Virginia creeper, answered his purpose, but he was always jaunty, gay, decorated with something or other. He came in behind the large figure of their neighbour, holding out a glove with a hole in the finger reproach-

fully to Lottie. "See how my child neglects me," he said. He liked to display himself even to Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, and stood and talked to her while Lottie, with no very good grace, put down her darning and mended his glove.

"When I was a young fellow, my dear lady," he said, "I never wanted for somebody to mend my glove; but a man can't expect to be as interesting to his daughter as he was in another stage of life."

"Oh, Captain, take me word," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, "the likes of you will always be interesting to one or another. You won't make me believe that ye find nobody but your daughter to do whatever ye ask them. Tell that—to another branch of the service, Captain Despard, me dear friend."

"You do me a great deal too much honour," he said with the laugh of flattered vanity; for he was not difficult in the way of compliments. "Alas, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who would pay any attention to an old married man, the father of a grown-up son and daughter, like me?"

"Sure, and you're much to be pitied, so old as ye are, with one foot in the grave, Captain dear," the old Irishwoman said; and they both laughed, she enjoying at once her joke, and the pleasure of seeing her victim's pleased appreciation of the compliment; while he, conscious of being still irresistible, eyed himself in the little glass over the mantelpiece, and was quite

unaware of the lurking demon of good-humoured malice and ridicule in her eyes.

"Not so bad as that perhaps," he said, "but bad enough. A man grows old fast in this kind of life. Matins every morning by cockcrow, to a man accustomed to take his ease, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. The Major grumbles, I make no doubt, as well as I."

"Sure it's nothing half as bad as morning parade. That's what O'Shaughnessy says; and he never was used to his ease, Captain. I took better care of him than that. But, Lottie, me honey, here we're talking of ourselves, and it's you I've come to hear about. How many hearts did ye break? how many scalps have ye got, as we used to say in Canada? It wasn't for nothing ye put on your finery, and those roses in your hair. The Captain, he's the one for a flower in his coat; you're his own daughter, Miss Lottie dear."

"Were you out last night, my child?" said Captain Despard, taking his glove from Lottie's hand. "Ah, at the Deanery. I hope my friend the Dean is well, and my Lady Caroline? Lady Caroline was once a very fine woman, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, though you would not think it. The Courtlands were neighbours of ours in our better days, and knew all our connections; and Lady Caroline has always been kind to Lottie. I do not think it necessary to provide any chaperon for her when she goes there. It is in society that a girl feels

the want of a mother; but where Lady Caroline is, Lottie can feel at home."

"Fancy that now," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, "how a body may be deceived! I never knew ye were among old friends, Captain. What a comfort to you —till you find somebody that will be a nice chaperon for your dear girl!"

"Yes, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, that would be a satisfaction; but where could I find one that would satisfy me after Lottie's dear mother, who was a pearl of a woman? Good-morning to you, my dear lady; I must be going," he said, kissing the fingers of the mended glove. And he went out of the room humming a tune, which, indeed, was as much a distinction of Captain Despard as the flower in his coat. He was always cheerful, whatever happened. His daughter looked up from her work, following him with her eyes, and Law, shut up in his room next door, stopped reading (which indeed he was very glad to do), and listened to the light carol of the Captain's favourite air and his jaunty step as he went downstairs. No lurch in that step now, but a happy confidence and cheerful ring upon the pavement when he got outside, keeping time surely not only to the tune, but to the Captain's genial and virtuous thoughts. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy looked after him without the cloud which was on his children's faces. She laughed. "Then, sure, it does *one's heart* good," she said, "to see a man as pleased

with himself as me friend the Captain. And Lottie, me darlin', speaking of that, there's a word I have to say to you. Ye heard what I said and ye heard what he said about a chaperon—though, bless the child, it's not much use, so far as I can see, that you have for a chaperon——"

"No use at all," cried Lottie, "and don't say anything about it, please. Papa talks; but nobody pays any attention to him," she exclaimed, with a flush of shame.

"If he'd stop at talking! but Lottie, me dear, when a man at his age gets women in his head, there's no telling what is to come of it. I wouldn't vex ye, me dear, but there's gossip about—that the Captain has thoughts——"

"Oh, never mind what gossip there is about! there's gossip about everything——"

"And that's true, me honey. There's your own self. They tell me a dozen stories. "It's married ye're going to be (and that's natural); and there's them that uphold it's not marriage at all, but music, or maybe the stage even, which is what I never would have thought likely——"

Lottie had risen to her feet, her eyes sparkling, her face crimson with excitement. "Wherever you hear it, please, *please* say it is a lie. I—on the stage! Oh, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, could you believe such a thing? I *would* rather die!"

"Dying's a strong step to take, me dear. I wouldn't go that length, Lottie; but at your age, and with your pretty looks, and all the world before ye, it's not the thing I would advise. I don't say but there are chances for a pretty girl that's well conducted——"

"Mrs. O'Shaughnessy! do you dare to speak to me so?" said Lottie with crimson cheeks, her eyes blazing through indignant tears. Well conducted! the insult went to her very soul. But this was beyond the perception of her companion.

"Just so, me, dear," she said. "There was Miss O'Neil, that was a great star in my time, and another stage lady that married the Earl of ——, one of the English earls. I forget his title. Lords and baronets and that sort of people are thrown in their way, and sometimes a pretty girl that minds what she is about, or even a plain girl that is clever, comes in for something that would never——Who is that, Lottie? Me dear, look out of the window, and tell me who it is."

Lottie did not say a word; she gasped with pain and indignation, standing erect in the middle of the room. How it made the blood boil in her veins to have the triumphs of the "stage-ladies" thus held up before her! She did not care who was coming. In her fantastical self-elevation, a sort of princess in her own sight, who was there here who would understand *Lottie's* "position" or her feelings? What was the use even of standing up for herself where everybody

would laugh at her? There was no one in the Chevaliers' Lodges who could render her justice. They would all think that to "catch" an earl or a Sir William was enough to content any girl's ambition. So long as she was well conducted! To be well conducted, is not that the highest praise that can be given to anyone? Yet it made Lottie's blood boil in her veins.

While she stood thus flushed and angry, the door was suddenly pushed open by the untrained "girl," who was all that the household boasted in the shape of a servant. "She's here, sir," this homely usher said; and lo, suddenly, into the little room where sat Mrs. O'Shaughnessy taking up half the space, and where Lottie stood in all the excitement and glow of passion, there walked Rollo Ridsdale, like a hero of romance, more perfect in costume, appearance, and manner, more courteous and easy, more graceful and gracious, than anything that had ever appeared within that lower sphere. The Captain was jaunty and shabby-genteel, yet even he sometimes dazzled innocent people with his grand air; but Mr. Ridsdale was all that the Captain only pretended to be, and the very sight of him was a revelation. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, sitting with her knees apart and her hands laid out upon her capacious lap, opened her mouth and gazed at him as if he *had been an angel* straight from the skies. *Mrs. O'Shaughnessy knew him*, as she knew every one

who came within the Abbey precincts. She was aware of every visit he paid to his aunt, and saw him from her window every time he passed up and down the Dean's Walk, and she had the most intimate acquaintance with all his connections, and knew his exact place in the Courtland family, and even that there had been vicissitudes in his life more than generally fall to the lot of young men of exalted position. And, if it did her good even to see him from her window, and pleased her to be able to point him out as the Honourable Rollo Ridsdale, it may be imagined what her feelings were, when she found herself suddenly under the same roof with him, in the same room with him. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy sat and stared, devouring his honourable figure with her eyes, with a vague sensation of delight and grandeur taking possession of her soul.

"You must pardon my intrusion at such an early hour, Miss Despard," he said. "I wanted your maid to ask if I might come in, and I did not know she was ushering me into your very presence. But I have my credentials with me. I bear a note from Lady Caroline, which she charged me to support with my prayers."

The passion melted out of Lottie's countenance. Her eyes softened—the very lines of her figure, all proud and erect and vehement, melted too as if by a spell—the flush of anger on her cheek changed to a

rose-red of gentler feeling. The transformation was exactly what the most accomplished actress would have desired to make, with the eye of an able manager inspecting her possibilities. "I beg your pardon," she said instinctively, with a sudden sense of guilt. It shocked her to be found so full of passion, so out of harmony with the melodious visitor who was in perfect tune and keeping with the sweet morning, and in whose presence all the vulgarities about seemed doubly vulgar. She felt humble, yet not humiliated. Here was at last one who would understand her, who would do her justice. She looked round to find a seat for him, confused, not knowing what to say.

"May I come here?" said Rollo, pushing forward for her the little chair from which she had evidently risen, and placing himself upon the narrow window-seat with his back to the light. "But let me give up my credentials first. My aunt is—what shall I say?—a little indolent, Miss Despard. Dear Aunt Caroline, it is an unkind word—shall I say she is not fond of action? Pardon if it is I who have acted as secretary. I do so constantly now that Augusta is away."

"Lottie," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, as Lottie, confused, took the note from his hand, and the chair he offered; "me dear!—you have not presented me to your friend."

Rollo got up instantly and bowed, as Lottie faltered forth his name ("A real bow," Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said

after; "sure you never get the like but in the upper classes"), while she herself, not to be outdone, rose too, and extended a warm hand—("What does the woman expect me to do with her hand?" was Mr. Ridsdale's alarmed commentary on his side).

"I'm proud to make your acquaintance, sir," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. "Me husband the Major was once a great friend of an uncle of yours, Mr. Ridsdale —or maybe it was a cousin; when we were out in Canada, in the Hundred and Fiftieth—the Honourable Mr. Green; they were together in musketry practice, and me Major had the pleasure of being of a great deal of use to the gentleman. Many a time he's told me of it; and when we came here, sure it was a pleasure to find out that me Lady Caroline was aunt—or maybe it was cousin to an old friend. I am very glad to make your acquaintance," Mrs. O'Shaughnessy continued, shaking him warmly by the hand, which she had held all this time. Mr. Ridsdale kept bowing at intervals, and had done all that he could, without positive rudeness, to get himself free.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I have cousins and uncles and that sort of thing scattered through the earth in every regiment under the sun; and very bad soldiers, I don't doubt, always wanting somebody to look after them. I am sure Major O'Shaughnessy was very kind. Won't you sit down?"

"It wasn't to make a brag of his kindness—not a

bit of that—but he is a kind man and a good man, Mr. Ridsdale, though I say it that shouldn't. I have been married to me Major these forty years, and if anyone knows it I ought to be the one to know."

"Undoubtedly, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. I for one am most ready to take the fact on your word."

"And you'd be in the right of it. A man's wife, that's the best judge of his character. Whatever another may say, she's the one that knows; and if she says too much, one way or the other, sure it's on herself it falls. But, maybe you're not interested, Mr. Ridsdale, in an old woman's opinions?"

"I am very much interested, I assure you," said Rollo, always polite. He kept an eye upon Lottie reading her note, but he listened to her friend (if this was her friend) with as much attention, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy always remembered, as if she had been a duchess at the least.

Meanwhile Lottie read the note, which purported to come from Lady Caroline, and had a wavering C. Huntington at the bottom of the page, which was her genuine autograph. The warmth of the appeal, however, to her dear Miss Despard, to take pity on the dulness of the Deanery and come in "quietly" that evening for a little music, was not in any way Lady Caroline's. She had consented indeed to permit herself to be sung to on Rollo's strenuous representation of the pleasure it had *given her.* "You know, Aunt

Caroline, you enjoyed it," he had said; and "Yes, I know I enjoyed it," Lady Caroline, much wavering, had replied. It would not have been creditable not to have enjoyed what was evidently such very good singing; but it was not she who wrote of the dulness of the Deanery nor who used such arguments to induce her dear Miss Despard to come. Lottie's countenance bending over the note glowed with pleasure as Mrs. O'Shaughnessy kept up the conversation. Even with those girls who think they believe that the admiration of men is all they care for, the approbation of a woman above their own rank is always a more touching and more thorough triumph than any admiration of men. And Lottie, though she was so proud, was all humility in this respect; that Lady Caroline should thus take her up, and encourage her, praise her, invite her, went to her very heart. She almost cried over the kind words. She raised her face all softened and glowing with happiness to the anxious messenger who was listening to Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, and as their eyes met a sudden smile of such responsive pleasure and satisfaction came to Rollo's face as translated Lottie back into the very paradise of her dreams.

"I can't say, me dear sir," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, "that things are just exactly as we wish here, or as we thought we had a right to look for. The Major and me, we've been used to a deal of fine company. *Wherever* we've gone, was it in Canada, was it the

Channel Islands, was it at the depôt of the regiment, we've always been called upon by the best. But here, sure the position is not what we were led to expect. Money is all that most people are thinking of. There's the society in the town would jump at us. But that does not count, Mr. Ridsdale, you know, that does not count; for to us in Her Majesty's service, that have always been accustomed to the best——"

"Surely, surely, I quite understand; and you have a right to the best. Miss Despard," said the ambassador, "I hope you are considering what Lady Caroline says, and will not disappoint our hopes. Last night was triumph, but this will be enjoyment. You, who must know what talent Miss Despard has—I appeal to you, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy—I am sure from your kind looks that we will have your aid."

"Is it to go and sing for them again, Lottie, me dear?" said the old lady in an undertone. "That's just what I don't like, Mr. Ridsdale—excuse me if I speak my mind free—me Lady Caroline and his reverence the Dean, they're ready enough to take an advantage, and make their own use of the Chevaliers'——"

"Do I need to write a note?" said Lottie, interrupting hastily to prevent the completion of a speech which seemed to threaten the very foundations of her happiness. "Perhaps it would be more polite to write a note." She looked at him with a little anxiety, for

the thought passed through her mind that she had no pretty paper like this, with a pretty monogram and "The Deanery, St. Michael's," printed on its creamy glaze, and even that she did not write a pretty hand that would do her credit; and, going further, that she would not know how to begin, whether she should be familiar, and venture upon saying, "Dear Lady Caroline," which seemed rather presumptuous, calling an old lady by her Christian name—or——

"I need not trouble you to write. I am sure you mean to say yes, Miss Despard, which is almost more than I dared hope. Yes is all we want, and I shall be so happy to carry it——"

"Yes is easy said," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy; "a great deal easier than no. Oh, me dear, I don't object to your going; not a bit; only I take an interest in ye, and ye must not make yourself too cheap. Know her talent, Mr. Ridsdale? sure I can't say that I do. I know herself, and a better girl, saving for a bit of temper, don't exist. But a girl is the better of a spark of temper, and that's just what you've got, me dear Lottie. No; I don't know her talent. She has a voice for singing, that I know well; for to hear her and Rowley when she's having her lesson, sure it's enough to give a deaf person the ear-ache. But that's the most that I know."

"Then, Miss Despard," said Rollo, springing to his feet; "if your—friend is in this condition of doubt, it is impossible she can ever have heard you; will you

not gratify me and convince her by singing something now? I know it is horrible impertinence on my part, so recent an acquaintance. But—no, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, you never can have heard her. I have some songs here that I know you would sing to perfection. deserve to be ordered out of the house for my presumption. I know it; but——" and he clasped his ands and fixed supplicating eyes upon Lottie, who, lushing, trembling, frightened, and happy, did not now how to meet those eyes.

"Sure he'll be down on his knees next," cried Mrs. 'Shaughnessy delighted; "and you wouldn't have the art to deny the gentleman when he begs so pretty. I not say but what I've heard her, and heard her any a time, but maybe the change of the circumances and the want of Rowley will make a difference. ome, Lottie, me darling, don't wait for pressing, but ve us a song, and let us be done with it. If it was good song you would sing, and not one of those cred pieces that make me feel myself in the Abbey -where we all are, saving your presence, often ough——"

"I have a song here that will please you, I know," aid Rollo. "We shall have you crying in two minutes. ou don't know, my dear Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, what a lorious organ you are talking of."

"Organ! that's the Abbey all over; but, praised be

Heaven, there's no organ here, only an old cracked piano——"

"Oh, indeed," cried Lottie. "It is not fit to play on, and I don't think I can sing at sight; and—I know I can't play an accompaniment."

"That shall be my happy office," he said, looking at her with those eyes that dazzled Lottie. They were not dazzling by nature, but he put a great deal of meaning into them, and Lottie, foolish Lottie, innocently deceived, put a great deal more. Her eyes sank beneath this look. She could scarcely keep the tears from coming into them, tears of confused pleasure and wonder and happiness; and she could not refuse him what he asked. He opened the wretched old piano, worn out and jingling, and out of tune as it was. And Mrs. O'Shaughnessy put her knees a little more apart, and threw her bonnet-strings over her shoulders, and spread out her warm hands in her lap. There was a little good-humoured cynicism in her face. She did not expect to enjoy the singing, but all her faculties were moved by the hint, the scent, of a flirtation; and tha she was prepared to enjoy to the full.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE MINOR CANON.

Mr. Ashford had not said much to Miss Despard on the way home; it was but crossing the road, a brief progress which left little room for conversation, and the Signor was better acquainted with her than he was. Besides, the Minor Canon was not a man who could carry on a conversation with several people at a time, or open his heart to more listeners than one. He could sometimes be eloquent with a single interlocutor, but he was a silent man in society, with very little to say for himself, even when his companions were of the most congenial kind. He was an unsuccessful man, and carried in his soul, though without any bitterness, the burden of his own unsuccess. He was a man of "good connections," but none of his connections had done anything for him — and he had considerable talents, which had done nothing for him. He had got a scholarship, but no other distinction, at the University. Nobody was at all clear how this came about. He was not idle, he was not careless, but he did not succeed; his talents were not those that win success. At twenty he published a little volume of poetry, which

was "full of promise." At thirty he brought ou learned treatise on some matter of classical erudit which, as it is too high for us to understand, we not venture to name. And nothing came of that; poems were not sold, neither was his treatise. fellow-scholars (for he was a true scholar, and a and good one) occupied themselves with pulling h in his coat, writing whole pages to show that he taken a wrong view of a special passage. And th was something worse than this that he had done. had put a wrong accent upon a Greek word! tremble to mention such a crime, but it cannot slurred over, for it was one of the heaviest troubles Mr. Ashford's life. Whether it was his fault or printer's fault will never be known till the day of ju ment, and perhaps not even then: for it seems m than likely that a mistake in an accent, or even absence of the accent altogether, will not affect reckoning at that decisive moment; but this was w had been done. Not once—which might have b an accident, or carelessness in correcting the pr such a misfortune as might occur to any man—bu dozen times, if not more, had this crime been p petrated. It disfigured at least the half of his bo It was a mistake which no properly conducted four form boy would have been guilty of. So everybo said;—and it crushed the unlucky man. Even n five years after, that incorrect accent coloured his li

He went in mourning for it all his days. He could not forget it himself, even if other people might have been willing to forget it. It seemed to justify and explain all the failures in his career. Everybody had wondered why he did not get a fellowship after he had taken his degree, but this explained everything. A man capable of making such a mistake! The buzz that arose in the University never died out of his ears. Robuster persons might laugh, but Ernest Ashford never got over it. It weighed him down for the rest of his days.

Nor was he a man to thrive much in his profession. He tried a curacy or two, but he was neither High Church enough for the High, nor Low Church enough for the Low. And he could not get on with the poor, his rectors said. Their misery appalled his gentle soul. He emptied his poor pockets in the first wretched house he went into, and retreated to his lodgings after he had done so, with a heart all aching and bleeding, and crying out against the pain he saw. He was not of the fibre which can take other people's sufferings placidly, though he had a fine nerve in bearing his own. This, no doubt, was weakness in him; and in all probability he got imposed upon on every side; but the fact was he could not support the wretchedness of others, and when he had given them every six-pence he had, and had entreated them to be comforted, he fled from them with anguish in his heart. He could

not eat or drink for weeks after for thinking that there were people in the world near at hand who had little or nothing on their board. He suffered more from this than his fellow-curate did from neuralgia, or his rector from biliousness, and he did what neither of these martyrs felt themselves compelled to do—he fled from the trouble he could not cope with. They quoted Scripture to him, and proved, from the text "The poor ye have always with you," that nothing better was to be expected. But he answered with a passionate protestation that God could never mean that, and fled—which, indeed, was not a brave thing to do, and proved the weakness of his character. Thus the Church found him wanting, as well as the University. And when at last he settled down into a corner where at least he could get his living tranquilly, it was not by means of his talents or education, but because of a quality which was really accidental, the possession of a beautiful voice. This possession was so entirely adventitious that he was not even a learned musician, nor had he given much of his time to this study. But he had one of those voices, rich and tender and sweet, which go beyond science, which are delicious even when they are wrong, and please the hearers when they perplex the choir and drive the conductor out of his senses. Mr. Ashford did not do this, having an ear almost as delicate as his voice, but both of these were gifts of *nature*, and not improved by training to the degree

which the Signor could have wished. He had been persuaded to try for the Minor Canonry of St. Michael's almost against his will; for to be a singing man, even in the highest grade, did not please his fancy. But no one had been able to stand before him. The Signor had strongly supported another competitor, a man with twice the science of Mr. Ashford; but even the Signor had been obliged to confess that his friend's voice was not to be compared with that of the successful candidate. And after knocking about the world for a dozen years without any real place or standing-ground, Ernest Ashford found himself at thirty-five suited with a life that was altogether harmonious to his nature, but which he felt half humiliated to have gained, not by his talents or his learning, or anything that was any credit to him, but by the mere natural accidental circumstance of his beautiful voice. He was half-ashamed and humbled to think that all his education, which had cost so much, went for nothing in comparison with this chance talent which had cost him nothing, and that all his hopes and ambitions, which had mounted high, had come to no loftier result. But as, by fair means or foul, for a good or bad reason, life had at last found a suitable career for him, where he could be independent, and do some sort of work, such as it was, he soon became content. The worst thing about it (he said) was that it could not be called work at all. To go twice a day and sing beautiful

music in one of the most beautiful churches in the world, would have been the highest pleasure, if it had not been the business of his life. He had never even been troubled by religious doubts which might have introduced a complication, but was of a nature simply devout, and born to go twice a day to church. When, however, he found himself thus, as it were, exalted over the common lot, he made an effort to bring himself down to the level of common mortality by taking pupils, an experiment which succeeded perfectly, and brought him into hot water so speedily that he no longer felt himself elevated above the level of mankind.

This was the man whom Lottie had seized the opportunity of making acquaintance with, and speaking to, that evening at the Deanery. Mr. Ashford was not badly treated at the Deanery to be only a Minor Canon. He was often enough asked to dinner when there was not anybody of much consequence about: the Dean was very willing to have him, for he was a gentleman, and talked very pleasantly, and could be silent (which he always was when the company was large) in a very agreeable, gentlemanly sort of way; not the silence of mere dulness and having nothing to say. But when there was a large dinner-party, and people of consequence were there, Lady Caroline would often ask Mr. Ashford to come in the evening, and he had come to understand (without being offended) that on these

occasions he would probably be asked to sing. He was not offended, but he was amused, and sometimes, with a little well-bred malice, such as he had never shown in any other emergency of his life, would have a cold, and be unable to sing. He had not strength of mind to carry out this little stratagem when there seemed to be much need of his services, but now and then he would wind himself up to do it, with much simple satisfaction in his own cleverness. Mr. Ashford was well treated in the Cloisters generally. The other Canons, those whom Mrs. O'Shaughnessy called "the real Canons," were all more or less attentive to him. He had nothing to complain of in his lot. He had at this moment two pupils in hand: one, the son of Canon Uxbridge, whom he was endeavouring to prepare for the simple ordeal of an army examination; and another, who was clever, the son of the clergyman in the town, and aspiring to a university scholarship. In consequence of the unfortunate failure of that Greek accent it was but few engagements of this more ambitious kind that Mr. Ashford had; his work was usually confined to the simplicity of the military tests of knowledge; but the rector of St. Michael's was a man who knew what he was about, and naturally, with a sharp young scholar for ever on his traces, the gentle Minor Canon, conscious of having once committed an inaccuracy, was kept very much upon his p's and q's.

On the same day on which Rollo Ridsdale wrote

for Lady Caroline that invitation to Lottie, of the terms of which Lady Caroline was so little aware, the Dean gave a verbal invitation to the same effect to Mr. Ashford in the vestry. "Will you dine with us to-day, Ashford?" he said. "My nephew Ridsdale, who is mad about music, and especially about this girl's voice who sang last night, has persuaded Lady Caroline to ask her again. Yourself and the Signor; I believe nobody else is coming. Ridsdale has got something to do with a new opera company, and he is wild to find an English prima donna——"

"Is Miss Despard likely to become a professional singer?" said the Minor Canon in some surprise.

"I am sure I can't tell—why not? They are poor, I suppose, or they would not be here; and I don't see why she shouldn't sing. Anyhow, Rollo is most anxious to try. He thinks she has a wonderful voice. He is apt to think anything wonderful which he himself has anything to do with, you know."

"She has a wonderful voice," said Mr. Ashford, with more decision than usual.

"But—pardon me if I interrupt," cried the Signor, who had come in while they were talking, "no method; no science. She wants training—the most careful training. The more beautiful a voice is by nature, the more evident is the want of education in it," the musician added, with meaning. He did not look at Mr. Ashford, but the reference was very unmistakable. The

Dean looked at them, and smiled as he took up his shovel hat.

"I leave you to fight it out, Science against Nature," he said; "as long as you don't forget that you are both expected this evening at the Deanery— and to sit in judgment as well as to dine."

"I know what my judgment will be beforehand," said the Signor; "absolute want of education—but plenty of material for a good teacher to work upon."

"And mine is all the other way," Mr. Ashford said, with some of the vehemence of intellectual opposition, besides a natural partisanship. "A lovely voice, full of nature, and freshness, and expression—which you will spoil, and render artificial, and like anybody else's voice, if you have your way."

"All excellence is the production of Art," said the Signor.

"Poeta nascitur," said the Canon; and though the words are as well known as any slang, they exercised a certain subduing influence upon the musician, who was painfully aware that he himself was not educated, except in a professional way. The two men went out together through the door into the Great Cloister, from which they passed by an arched passage to the Minor Cloister, where was Mr. Ashford's house. Nothing could be more unlike than the tall, stooping, short-sighted scholar, and the dark keen Italianism of the Anglicised foreigner—the one man full of perception, seeing every-

thing within his range at a glance, the other living a glimmer of vague impressions, which took form b slowly in his mind. On the subject of their prese discussion, however, Ashford had taken as distinct view as the Signor. He had put himself on Lotti side instinctively, with what we have called a natu partisanship. She was like himself, she sang as t birds sing—and though his own education, after a fe years of St. Michael's, had so far progressed musical that he was as well aware of her deficiencies as t Signor, still he felt himself bound to be her champio

"I am not sure how far we have any right to di cuss a young lady who has never done anything provoke animadversion," he said, with an old-fashion scrupulousness, as they threaded the shady passag "I think it very unlikely that such a girl would ev consent to sing for the public."

"That is what she says," said the Signor, "b she can't understand what she is saying. Sing f the public! I suppose that means to her to appe before a crowd of people, to be stared at, c ticised, brought down to the level of profession singers. The delight of raising a crowd to one'se binding them into mutual sympathy, getting at t heart underneath the cold English exterior, that what the foolish girl never thinks of and cannot u derstand."

"Ah!" said the Minor Canon. He was struck b

this unexpected poetry in the Signor, who was not a poetical person. He said, "I don't think I thought of that either. I suppose, for my part, I am very old-fashioned. I don't like a woman to make an exhibition of herself."

"Do you suppose a real artist ever makes an exhibition of herself?" said the musician almost scornfully. "Do you suppose she thinks of herself? Oh, yes, of course there are varieties. Men will be men and women women; but anyone who has genius, who is above the common stock! However," he added, calming himself down, and giving a curious, alarmed glance at his companion, to see whether, perhaps, he was being laughed at for his enthusiasm, "there are other reasons, that you will allow to be solid reasons, for which I want to get hold of this Miss Despard. You know Purcell, my assistant, a young fellow of the greatest promise?"

"Purcell? oh, yes; you mean the son of——"

"I mean my pupil," said the Signor, hurriedly, with a flush of offence.

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean anything unkind. It was only to make sure whom you meant. I know he is a good musician and everything that is good."

"He is a very fine fellow," said the Signor, still flushed and self-assertive. "There is nobody of whom I have a higher opinion. He is a better musician than

I am, and full of promise. I expect him to reach the very top of his profession."

Mr. Ashford bowed. He had no objection to young Purcell's success: why should he be supposed to have any objection to it? but the conversation had wandered widely away from Miss Despard, in whom he was really interested, and his attention relaxed in a way which he could not disguise. This seemed to disturb the Signor still more. He faltered; he hesitated. At last he said with a sudden burst, "You think this has nothing to do with the subject we were discussing; but it has. Purcell, poor fellow! has a—romantic devotion; a passion which I can't as yet call anything but unhappy—for Miss Despard."

"For Miss Despard?"

The Minor Canon turned round at his own door with his key in his hand, lifting his eyes in wonder. "That is surely rather misplaced," he said the next moment, with much more sharpness than was usual to him, opening the door with a little extra energy and animation. He had no reason whatever for being annoyed, but he was annoyed, though he could not have told why.

"How misplaced?" said the Signor, following him up the little oak staircase, narrow and broken into short flights, which led to the rooms in which the *Minor Canon* lived. The landing at the top of the *staircase* was as large as any of the rooms to which it

led, with that curious misappropriation of space, but admirable success in picturesque effect, peculiar to old houses. There was a window in it, with a window-seat, and such a view as was not to be had ouf of St. Michael's, and the walls were of dark wainscot, with bits of rich old carving here and there. The Canon's little library led off from this and had the same view. It was lighted by three small, deep-set windows set in the outer wall of the Abbey, and consequently half as thick as the room was large. They were more like three pictures hung on the dark wall than mere openings for light, which indeed they supplied but sparingly, the thickness of the wall casting deep shadows between. And the walls, wherever they were visible, were dark oak, here and there shining with gleams of reflection, but making a sombre background, broken only by the russet colour of old books and the chance ornaments of gilding which embellished them. Mr. Ashford's writing-table, covered with books and papers, stood in front of the centre window. There was room for a visitor on the inner side, between him and the bookcases on the further wall, and there was room for somebody in the deep recess of the window at his left hand; but that was all.

"How misplaced? the Signor repeated, coming in and taking possession of the window-seat. "He is not perhaps *what you call a gentle*man by birth, but he is *a great deal better. You* and I know gentlemen by

birth who—but don't let us talk blasphemy within t Precincts. I am a Tory. I take my stand upon bi and blood and primogeniture."

"And laugh at them?"

"Oh, not at all; on the contrary, I think they very good for the country; but you and I have kno gentlemen by birth—Well! my young Purcell is one of these, but sprung from the soil. He is a capi musician; he is a rising young man. In what is worse than the daughter of a commonplace old sold a needy, faded gentleman of a Chevalier?"

"Gently! gently! I cannot permit you to say a thing against the Chevaliers. They are brave men, a men who have served their country——"

"Better than a good musician serves his?" cried Signor. "You will not assert as much. Better th we serve the country, who put a little tune and ti into her, an idea of some thing better than fifes a drums?"

"My dear Rossinetti," said Mr. Ashford, with so heat, "England had music in her before a sin maestro had ever come from the South, and will h after——"

"No tragedy," said the Signor, with a low lau putting up his hand. "I am not a maestro, nor d come from the South. I serve my country when I te these knavish boys, that would rather be playing the streets, to lengthen their snipped vowels. But s

pose they do better who fight—I say nothing against that. I am not speaking of all the Chevaliers, but of one, and one who is very unlike the rest—the only person who has anything to do with the argument—a wretched frequenter of taverns, admirer of milliners' girls, who is said to be going to marry some young woman of that class. Why should not Purcell, the best fellow in the world, be as good as he?"

"I don't know the father—and it is not the father Purcell has a romantic devotion for. But don't you see, Rossinetti, we are allowing ourselves to discuss the affairs of people we know nothing of, people we have no right to talk about. In short, we are *gossiping*, which is not a very appropriate occupation."

"Oh, there is a great deal of it done by other persons quite as dignified as we are," said the Signor, with a smile; but he accepted the reproof and changed the subject. They sat together and talked, looking over the great width of the silent country, the trees and the winding river, the scattered villages, and the illuminated sky. How beautiful it was! fair enough of itself to make life sweeter to those who had it before their eyes. But the two men talked and took no notice. They might have been in a street in London for any difference it made.

When, however, the Signor was gone, Mr. Ashford, having closed the door upon his visitor, came straying back to the window in which Rossinetti had been

seated, and stood there gazing out vaguely. In all likelihood he saw nothing at all, for he was short-sighted, as has been said; but yet it is natural to seek the relief of the window and look out when there is something within of a confused and vaguely melancholy character to occupy one's thoughts. Twenty-four hours before, Mr. Ashford had not known who Lottie Despard was. He had seen her in the Abbey, and perhaps had found, without knowing it, that sympathy in her face which establishes sometimes a kind of tacit friendship long before words. He thought now that this must have been the case; but he knew very little about her still—nothing except that she had a beautiful voice, a face that interested him, and something she wanted to talk to him about. What was it she wanted to talk to him about? He could not imagine what it could be, but he recollected very well how pleasant a thing it was when this beautiful young lady, lifting the long fringes which veiled them, turned upon him those beautiful blue eyes which (he thought) were capable of expressing more feeling than eyes of any other colour. Probably had Lottie's eyes been brown or grey, Mr. Ashford would have been of exactly the same opinion. And to think of this creature as the beloved of Purcell gave him a shock. Purcell! it was not possible. No doubt he was a respectable fellow, very much to be applauded and encouraged:—but Mr. Ashford himself had nothing to do with Miss Despard;

he was pleased to think that he should meet her again and hear her sing again, and he must try, he said to himself, to find an opportunity to ask her what it was about which she wanted to speak to him. Otherwise he had no hand, and wanted to have no hand, in this little conspiracy of which she seemed the unconscious object. On the contrary, his whole sympathies were with Lottie against the men who wanted to entrap her and make her a public singer whether she would or not. He was glad she did not want it herself, and felt a warm sympathy with her in those natural prejudices against "making an exhibition of herself" which the Signor scorned so much. The Signor might scorn those shrinkings and shyness; they were altogether out of his way; he might not understand them. But Mr. Ashford understood them perfectly. He liked Lottie for having them, comprehended her, and felt for her. Anything rather than *that*, he thought, with a little tremulous warmth, as if she had been his sister. If there should be any discussion on this subject to-night at the Deanery, and she was in need of support, he would stand by her. Having made this resolution he went back to his writing-table and sat down in his usual place, and put this intrusive business, which did not in the least concern him, out of his mind.

The most intrusive subject! What had he to do with it? And yet it was not at all easy to get it out of his mind. He had not read three lines when he

felt himself beginning to wonder why Rollo Ridsdale had chosen Miss Despard as his prima donna above everybody else, and why the Signor concerned himself so much about it. She had certainly a beautiful voice, but still voices as beautiful had been heard before. It could not be supposed that there was no one else equal to her. Why should they make so determined a set at this girl, who was a lady, and who had not expressed any wish or intention of being a singer? To be sure, she was very handsome as well, and her face was full of expression. And Rollo was a kind of enthusiast when he took anything in his head. Then there was the other imbroglio with the Signor and Purcell. What was Purcell to the Signor that he should take up his cause so warmly? But, then, still more mysterious, what was it all to him, Ernest Ashford, that it should come between him and the book he was reading? Nothing could be more absurd. He got up after awhile, and went to the window again, where he finally settled himself with a volume of Shelley, to which he managed to fix the thoughts which had been so absurdly disturbed by this stranger, and this question with which he had nothing to do. It was a very idle way of spending the afternoon, to recline in a deep window looking out upon miles of air and distance and read Shelley; but it was better than getting involved in the mere gossip of St. Michael's and *turning* over in his head against his will the private

affairs of people whom he scarcely knew. This was the disadvantage of living in a small circle with so few interests, he said to himself. But he got delivered from the gossip by means of the poetry, and so lay there while the brilliant sunshine slanted from the west, now sending his thoughts abroad over the leafy English plain, now feeding his fancy with the poet among the Euganean hills.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ANOTHER EVENING AT THE DEANERY.

MR. RIDSDALE had perhaps never touched, and rarely heard, anything so bad as the old cracked piano which Lottie had inherited from her mother, and which was of the square form now obsolete, of a kind which brokers (the only dealers in the article) consider very convenient, as combining the character of a piano and a sideboard. Very often had Lottie's piano served the purpose of a sideboard, but it was too far gone to be injured—nothing could make it worse. Nevertheless Mr. Ridsdale played the accompaniments upon it, without a word, to Lottie's admiration and wonder, for he seemed to be able to draw forth at his fingers' ends a volume of sound which she did not suppose to be within the power of the old instrument. He had brought several songs with him, being fully minded to hear her that morning, whatever obstacles might be in the way. But it so happened that there were no obstacles whatever in the way; and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy was of the greatest service as audience. With the true talent of a manager, Mr. Ridsdale addressed himself to the subjugation of his public. He placed be-

fore Lottie the song from "Marta," to which, hearing it thus named, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy prepared herself to listen with a certain amiable scorn. "Ah, we shall have you crying in five minutes," he said. "Is it me you're meaning?" she cried in high scorn. But the fact was that when the melting notes of "The Last Rose of Summer" came forth from Lottie's lips, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy was altogether taken by surprise, and carried out Rollo's prophecy to the letter by weeping abundantly. There was much of Mr. Ridsdale's music which Lottie could not sing—indeed, it would have been wonderful if she had been able to do so, as he had brought with him the finest *morceaux* of a dozen operas, and Lottie's musical education had been of the slightest. But he so praised, and flattered, and encouraged her, that she went on from song to song at his bidding, making the best attempt at them that was possible, while Mrs. O'Shaughnessy sat by and listened. Her presence there was of the utmost consequence to them. It at once converted Rollo's visit into something allowable and natural, and it gave him a pretence for beginning what was really an examination into Lottie's powers and compass, at once of voice and of intelligence. Lottie, innocent of any scheme, or of any motive he could have, save simple pleasure in her singing, exerted herself to please him with the same mixture of gratitude and happy prepossession with which she had thought *of him* for so long. If she

could give a little pleasure to him who had given he his love and his heart (for what less could it be tha he had given her?), it was her part, she thought, to d so. She felt that she owed him everything she coul do for him, to recompense him for that gift which h had given her unawares. So she stood by him in soft humility, not careful that she was showing he own ignorance, thinking only of pleasing him. Wha did it matter, if he were pleased, whether she attaine the highest excellence? She said sweetly, "I know cannot do it, but if you wish it I will try," and a tempted feats which in other circumstances would hav appalled her. And the fact was, that thus forgettin herself, and thinking only of pleasing him, Lotti sang better than she had ever done in her life, bette even than she had done in the Deanery on th previous night. She committed a thousand faults, bu these faults were as nothing in comparison with th melody of her voice and the purity of her taste. Roll became like one inspired. All the enthusiasm of a amateur, and all the zeal of an enterprising manage were in him. The old piano rolled out notes of whic in its own self it was quite incapable under his rapi fingers. He seemed to see her with all London be fore her, at her feet, and he (so to speak) at once th discoverer and the possessor of this new star. N wonder the old piano grew ecstatic under his touch he who had gone through so many vicissitudes, wh

had made so many failures; at last it seemed evident to him that his fortune was made. Unfortunately (though that he forgot for the moment) he had felt his fortune to be made on several occasions before.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy gave a great many nods and smiles when at last he went away. "I say nothing, me dear, but I have my eyesight," she said, "and a blind man could see what's in the wind. So that is how it is, Lottie, me darling? Well, well! I always said you were the prettiest girl that had been in the Lodges this many a year. I don't envy ye, me love, your rise in the world. And I hope, Lottie, when ye're me lady, ye'll not forget your old friends."

"How should I ever be my lady?" said Lottie; "indeed, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, I don't know what you mean."

"No, me honey, the likes of you never do, till the right moment comes," said the old lady, going down the narrow stairs. She kissed her hand to Lottie, who looked after her from the window as she appeared on the pavement outside, and, with her bonnet-strings flying loose, turned in at her own door. Her face was covered with smiles and her mind full of a new interest. She could not refrain from going into the Major's little den, and telling him. "Nonsense!" the Major said, incredulously; "one of your mare's-nests." "Sure it was a great deal better than a mare, it was turtle-doves made the nest I'm thinking of," said Mrs.

O'Shaughnessy; and she took off her bonnet and seated herself at her window, from which she inspected the world with a new warmth of interest, determined not to lose a single incident in this new fairy tale.

Law came out of his room, where he had been "reading," when Mrs. O'Shaughnessy went away. "What has all this shrieking been about," said Law, "and thumping on that old beast of a piano? You are always at a fellow about reading, and when he does read you disturb him with your noise. How do you think I could get on with all that miauling going on? Who has been here?"

"Mr. Ridsdale has been here," said Lottie demurely. "He brought me a note from Lady Caroline, and I am going again to the Deanery to-night."

Law whistled a long whew—ew! "Again, to-night! she'd better ask you to go and live there," said the astounded boy; and he said no more about his interrupted reading, but put his big book philosophically away; for who could begin to read again after all the disturbances of the morning, and after such a piece of news as this?

Lottie dressed herself with more care than ever that evening. She began to wish for ornaments, and to realise how few her decorations were; the little pearl locket was so small, and her arms seemed so bare without any bracelets. However, she made herself little bands of black velvet, and got the maid to fasten

them on. She had never cared much for ornaments before. And she spent a much longer time than usual over the arrangement of her hair. Above all she wanted to look like a lady, to show that, though their choice of her was above what could have been expected, it was not above the level of what she was used to. *Their* choice of her—that was how it seemed to Lottie. The young lover had chosen, as it is fit the lover should do; but Lady Caroline had ratified his election, and Lottie, proud yet entirely humble in the tender humility born of gratitude, wanted to show that she could do credit to their choice. She read the note which purported to be Lady Caroline's over and over again; how kind it was! Lady Caroline's manner perhaps was not quite so kind. People could not control their manner. The kindest heart was often belied, Lottie was aware, by a stiffness, an awkwardness, perhaps only a shyness, which disguised their best intentions. But the very idea of asking her was kind, and the letter was so kind that she made up her mind never again to mistake Lady Caroline. She had difficulty in expressing herself, no doubt. She was indolent perhaps. At her age and in her position it was not wonderful if one got indolent; but in her heart she was kind. This Lottie repeated to herself as she put the roses in her hair. In her heart Lady Caroline was kind; the girl felt sure that she could never mistake her, never be disappointed in her again. And in

this spirit she tripped across the Dean's Walk, M
O'Shaughnessy watching from her window. It was
most dark, but it was not one of the Signor's nig
for practice, and only a few of the inhabitants of
Abbey Precincts were enjoying the air on the Terr
pavement. They all saw her as she came out in
twilight with her uncovered head. Law had gone (
and there was nobody to go with her this time to
Deanery door. But Lottie had no difficulty in find
an escort: as she came out, looking round her sh
to watch for a quiet moment when no one was ab(
Captain Temple came forward, who lived two do
off, and was passing as she came to the little gar(
gate. He was the preux chevalier of all the Chevali
He came forward with a fatherly smile upon his k
face. "You are looking for some one to go with yc
he said; "your father has gone out. I saw him.
me take his place."

"Oh, thanks! I am going to the Deanery. I thou
Law would have waited for me."

"Law, like others of his age, has his own conce
to think of," said Captain Temple, "but I am used
this kind of work. You have heard of my girl, M
Despard?"

"Yes, Captain Temple——." Lottie, touched s
denly in the sympathetic sentiment of her own be
ning life, looked up at him with wistful eyes.

"She was a pretty creature, like yourself, my d(

My wife and I often talk of you, and think you like her. She was lost to us before she went out of the world, and I think it broke her heart—as well as ours. Take care of the damp grass with your little white shoes."

"Oh, Captain Temple, do not come with me," said Lottie, with tears in her eyes. "I can go very well alone. It is too hard upon you."

"No—I like it, my dear. My wife cannot talk of it, but I like to talk of it. You must take care not to marry anyone that will carry you quite away from your father's house."

"As if that would matter! as if papa would care!" Lottie said in her heart, with a half pity, half envy, of Captain Temple's lost daughter; but this was but a superficial feeling in comparison with the great compassion she had for him. The old Chevalier took her across the road as tenderly and carefully as if even her little white shoes were worth caring for. There was a moist brightness about his eyes as he looked at her pretty figure. "The roses are just what you ought to wear," he said. "And whenever you want anyone to take care of you in this way, send for me; I shall like to do it. Shall I come back for you in case your father should be late?"

"Oh, Captain Temple, papa never minds! but it is quite easy to get back," she said, thinking that perhaps this time *he*——

"I think it is always best that a young lady shou have her own attendant, and not depend on anyo to see her home," said the old Captain. And he ra the bell at the Deanery door, and took off his hat, wi a smile which almost made Lottie forget Lady Caroli She went into the drawing-room accordingly much l timidly than she had ever done before, and no lon felt any fear of Mr. Jeremie, who admitted her, thou he was a much more imposing person than Capt Temple. This shade of another life which had co over her seemed to protect Lottie, and strengthen h mind. The drawing-room was vaguely lighted w clusters of candles here and there, and at first she s nobody, nor was there any indication held out to h that the mistress of the house was in the room, exc the solemn tone of Jeremie's voice announcing h Lottie thought Lady Caroline had not come in fr the dining-room, and strayed about looking at t books and ornaments on the tables. She even beg to hum an air quietly to herself, by way of keeping her own courage, and it was not till she had alm taken her seat unawares on Lady Caroline's dress, tended on the sofa, that she became aware that s was not alone. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she cr out in a sudden panic. "I thought there was no o in the room." Lady Caroline made no remark at except to say "How do you do, Miss Despard?" Th was what she had made up her mind to say, feeli

it to be quite enough for the occasion—and Lady Caroline did not easily change her mind when it was once made up. She thought it very impertinent of the girl to come in and look at the photographs on the tables, and even to take the liberty of singing, but there was no calculating what these sort of people might do. She had nearly sat down on Lady Caroline's feet! "This is what I put up with for Rollo," the poor lady said to herself; and it seemed to her that a great deal of gratitude from Rollo was certainly her due. She did not move, nor did she ask Miss Despard to sit down; but Lottie, half in fright, dropped into a chair very near the strange piece of still life on the sofa. The girl had been very much frightened to see her, and for a moment was speechless with the horror of it. Nearly to sit down upon Lady Caroline! and a moment of silence ensued. Lady Caroline did not feel in the least inclined to begin a conversation. She had permitted the young woman to be invited, and she had said "How do you do, Miss Despard?" and she did not know what more could be expected from her. So they sat close together in the large, half-visible, dimly-illuminated room, with the large window open to the night, and said nothing to each other. Lottie, who was the visitor, was embarrassed, but Lady Caroline was not embarrassed. She felt no more need to speak than did the table with the photographs upon it which Lottie had stopped to look at. As for Lottie,

she bore it as long as she could, the stillness of the room, the flicker of the candles, the dash and fall of a moth now and then flying across the lights, and the immovable figure on the sofa with its feet tucked up and floods of beautiful rich silk enveloping them. A strange sense that Lady Caroline was not living at all that it was only the picture of a woman that was laid out on the sofa came over her. In her nervousness she began to tremble, then felt inclined to laugh. At last it became evident to Lottie that to speak was a necessity, to break the spell which might otherwise stupefy her senses too.

"It is a beautiful night," was all she managed to say; could anything be more feeble? but Lady Caroline gave no reply. She made the usual little movement of her eyelids, which meant an assent; indeed it was not a remark which required reply. And the silence fell on them again as bad as ever. The night air blew in, the moths whirled about the candles, dashed against the globe of the lamp, dropped on the floor with fatal infinitesimal booms of tragic downfall; and Lady Caroline lay on the sofa, with eyes directed to vacancy looking at nothing. Lottie, with the roses in her hair and so much life tingling in her, could not endure it. She wanted to go and shake the vision on the sofa, she wanted to cry out and make some noise or other to save herself from the spell. At last, when she could keep silence no longer, she jumped up, throwing over

a small screen which stood near in her vehemence of action. "Shall I sing you something, Lady Caroline?" she said.

Lady Caroline was startled by the fall of the screen. She watched till it was picked up, actually looking at Lottie, which was some advance; then she said, "If you please, Miss Despard," in her calm tones. And Lottie, half out of herself, made a dash at the grand piano, though she knew she could not play. She struck a chord or two, trembling all over, and began to sing. This time she did not feel the neglect or unkindness of the way in which she was treated. It was a totally different sensation. A touch of panic, a touch of amusement was in it. She was afraid that she might be petrified too if she did nothing to break the spell. But as she began to sing, with a quaver in her voice, and a little shiver of nervous chilliness in her person, the door opened, and voices, half discerned figures of men, life and movement, came pouring in. Lottie came to an abrupt stop in the middle of a bar.

"This will never do," said the suave Dean: "you make too much noise, Rollo. You have frightened Miss Despard in the middle of her song."

Then Rollo came forward into the light spot round the piano, looking very pale; he was a good deal more frightened than Lottie was. Could it be possible that she had made a false note? He was in an agony

of horror and alarm. "I—make a noise!" he "my dear uncle!" He looked at her with appe eyes full of anguish. "You were not—singing, Despard? I am sure you were not singing, only t the piano."

"I thought it would perhaps—amuse Lady Caro line." Lottie did not know what she had done tha was wrong. The Signor wore an air of trouble too Only Mr. Ashford's face, looking at her, as one fol lowed another into the light, reassured her. She turned to him with a little anxiety. "I cannot play; it is quite true; perhaps I ought not to have touched the piano," she said.

"You were startled," said the Minor Canon, kindly. "Your voice fluttered like those candles in the draught." The others still looked terribly serious, and did not speak.

"And I sang false," said Lottie; "I heard myself. It was terrible; but I thought I was stiffening into stone," she said, in an undertone, and she gave an alarmed look at Lady Caroline on the sofa. This restored the spirits of the others spectators, who looked at each other relieved.

"Thank Heaven, she knew it," Rollo whispered to the Signor; "it was fright, pure fright—and my aunt——"

"What else did you suppose it was?" answered in the same tone, but with some scorn, the Signor.

"Miss Despard, don't think you are to be permitted to accompany yourself," said Rollo. "Here are two of us waiting your pleasure. Signor, I will not pretend to interfere when you are there. May we have again that song you were so good——?"

"Ah, pardon me," he cried coming close to her to get the music. "I do not want to lose a minute. I have been on thorns this half-hour. I ought to have been here waiting ready to receive you, as you ought to be received."

"Oh, it did not matter," said Lottie, confused. "I am sorry I cannot play. I wanted—to try—to amuse Lady Caroline."

By this time the Signor had arranged the music on the piano and began to play. The Dean had gone off to the other end of the room, where the evening paper, the last edition, had been laid awaiting him on a little table on which stood a reading-lamp. The green shade of the lamp concentrated the light upon the paper, and the white hands of the reader, and his long limbs and his little table, making a new picture in the large dim room. On the opposite side sat Lady Caroline, who had withdrawn her feet hastily from the sofa, and sat bolt upright as a tribute to the presence of "the gentlemen." These two pieces of still life *appeared to Lottie* vaguely through the partial *gloom. The master* and mistress of the house were

paying no attention to the visitors. these were not of sufficient importanc or to disturb their entertainers in th their evening. Lady Caroline, indeed herself to be disturbed by anyone. her feet for the sake of her own dig not feel called upon to make any And as for Lottie, she was not ha three men. She shrank from Rollo, her with an anxiety which she coul and longed for Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, woman to stand by her. Her hea shivered again with that chill which and fancy. The Dean with his ru Lady Caroline with her vacant eyes, end of the room, and Lottie felt is cast upon the tender mercies of th seurs, a girl with no woman near to seemed to her for the moment as into the floor altogether, or else turn

It was Mr. Ashford again who aid. "Play something else first," the Signor, disregarding the anxiou who had placed himself on a chair a so that he might be able to see th any false note that might be coming t The others were both kind and cl *the man* whom Lottie thought her

anxiety for the moment took all thought from him, and more clever too. The Signor began to play Handel, the serious noble music with which Lottie had grown familiar in the Abbey, and soon Mr. Ashford stepped in and sang in his beautiful melodious voice. Then the strain changed, preluding a song which the most angelic of the choristers had sung that morning. The Minor Canon put the music into Lottie's hands. "Begin here," he whispered. She knew it by ear and by heart, and the paper trembled in her hands; but they made her forget herself, and she began, her voice thrilling and trembling, awe and wonder taking possession of her. She had heard it often, but she had never realised what it was till, all human, womanish, shivering with excitement and emotion, she began to sing. It did not seem her own doing at all. The dim drawing-room, with the Dean reading the paper, the men in their evening coats, the glimmering reflection of herself which she caught in the long mirror, in her simple decorations, the roses trembling in her hair, all seemed horribly inappropriate, almost profane, to Lottie. And the music shook in her hands, and the notes, instead of remaining steadily before her eyes, where she could read them, took wings to themselves and floated about, now here, now there, sometimes gleaming upon her, sometimes eluding her. Yet she sang, *she could not* tell how, forgetting every-*thing, though she saw and felt* everything, in a passion,

in an inspiration, penetrated through and through b the music and the poetry, and the sacredness, above he and all of them. "I know that my Redeemer liveth. Oh, how did she dare to sing it, how could thos commonplace walls enclose it, those men stand an listen as if it was *her* they were listening to? By an by the Dean laid down his paper. Rollo, in th background, gazing on her at first in pale anxiet then with vexed disapproval (for what did he wan with Handel?), came nearer and nearer, his fac catching some reflection of hers as she went on. An when Lottie ended, in a rapture she could not explai or understand, they all came pressing round her, din and blurred figures in her confused eyes. But th girl was too greatly strained to bear their approach o hear what they said. She broke away from them and rushed, scarcely knowing what she did, to Lad Caroline's side. Lady Caroline herself was roused She made room for the trembling creature, and Lotti threw herself into the corner of the capacious sof and covered her face with her hands.

But when she came to herself she would not sin any more. A mixture of guilt and exultation was i her mind. "I ought not to have sung it. I am no good enough to sing it. I never thought what i meant till now," she said trembling. "Oh, I hop you will forgive me. I never knew what it mean before."

"Forgive you!" said the Dean. "We don't know how to thank you, Miss Despard." He was the person who ought to know what it meant if anybody did. And when he had thus spoken he went back to his paper, a trifle displeased by the fuss she made; as if *she* could have any new revelation of the meaning of a thing which, if not absolutely written for St. Michael's, as good as belonged to the choir, which belonged to the Dean and Chapter! There was a certain presumption involved in Lottie's humility. He went back to his reading-lamp, and finished the article which had been interrupted by her really beautiful rendering of a very fine solo. It was really beautiful; he would not for a moment deny that. But if Miss Despard turned out to be excitable, and gave herself airs, like a real prima donna! Heaven be praised, the little chorister boys never had any nerves, but sang whatever was set before them, without thinking what was meant, the Dean said to himself. And it would be difficult to describe Rollo Ridsdale's disappointment. He sat down in a low chair by the side of the sofa, and talked to her in a whisper. "I understand you," he said; "it is like coming down from the heaven of heavens, where you have carried us. But the other spheres are celestial too. Miss Despard, I shall drop down into sheer earth to-morrow. I am going away. I shall lose the happiness of hearing you altogether. Will you not have pity upon me, and lead me a

little way into the earthly paradise?" But even these prayers did not move Lottie. She was too much shaken and disturbed out of the unconscious calm of her being for anything more.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

ттіе ran out while Rollo Ridsdale was getting
t to accompany her home. She caught up her
over her arm without pausing to put it on, and
ırough the dark Cloister and across the Dean's
to her own door, before he knew she was ready.
young—lady is gone, sir," Mr. Jeremie said, who
ıther indignant at having to open the door to
sort of people. He would have said young
ı had he dared. Rollo, much piqued already
t she had refused to sing for him further, and
rritated, half attracted by this escapade now,
ł after her; but when he emerged from the
of the Cloister to the fresh dewy air of the
and the breadth of the Dean's Walk, lying half
in summer darkness in the soft indistinct
ce of the stars, there was no one visible, far
r. She had already gone in before he came in
of the door. He looked up and down the
way, on which not a creature was visible, and
d to the sound of the door closing behind her.
ight and the sound awoke a new sentiment in
nd. Ladies were not apt to avoid Rollo.

Not his the form nor his the eye
That youthful maidens wont to fly.

He was piqued and he was roused. Heretofore, honestly, there had been little but music in his thoughts. The girl was very handsome, which was so much the better—very much the better, for his purpose; but this sparkle of resistance in her roused something else in his mind. Lottie had been like an inspired creature as she sang, this evening. He had never seen on the stage or elsewhere so wonderful an exhibition of absorbed impassioned feeling. If he could secure her for his prima donna, nowhere would such a prima donna be seen. It was not that she had thrown herself into the music, but that the music had possessed her, and transported her out of herself. This was not a common human creature. She was no longer merely handsome, but beautiful in the fervour of her feeling. And for the first time Lottie as Lottie, not merely as a singer, touched a well-worn but still sensitive chord in his breast. He stood looking at the door, which still seemed to echo in the stillness with the jar of closing. What did her flight mean? He was provoked, tantalised, stimulated. Whatever happened, he must see more of this girl. Why should she fly from him? He did not choose to return and tell the story of her flight, which was such an incident as always makes the man who is baulked present a more *or less* ridiculous aspect to the spectators; but he

stood outside and waited till the steps of the Minor Canon and the Signor had become audible turning each towards their habitation, and even the turning of Mr. Ashford's latchkey in his door. Everything was very still in the evening at St. Michael's. The respectable and solemn Canons in their great houses, and the old Chevaliers in their little lodges, went early to bed. Rollo saw no light anywhere except a dim glow in the window of the little drawing-room where he had spent the morning, and where no doubt the fugitive was seated breathless. His curiosity was raised, and his interest, supplanting that professional sternness about her voice which he had expressed so vigely. Why did she run away from him? Why did she refuse to sing for him? These questions suddenly sprang into his mind, and demanded, if not reply, yet a great deal of consideration. He could not make up his mind what the cause could be.

As for Lottie, she could not have given any reasonable answer to these questions, though she was the only living creature who could know why she ran away. As a matter of fact, she did not know. The music had been more than she could bear in the state of excitement in which she was. Excited about things she would have been ashamed to confess any special interest in—about her relations with the Deanery, about Lady Caroline, and, above all, about Rollo—the wonderful strain to which she had all unconsciously

and unthinkingly, at first, given utterance, had caught at Lottie like a hand from heaven. She had been drawn upward into the fervour of religious ecstasy, she who was so ignorant; and when she dropped again to earth, and was conscious once more of Rollo and of Lady Caroline, there had come upon her a sudden sense of shame and of her own pettiness and inability to disentangle herself from the links that drew her to earth which was as passionate as the sudden fervour. How dare she sing *that* one moment, and the next be caught down to vulgar life, to Lady Caroline and Rollo Ridsdale? Lottie would sing no more, and could not speak, so strong was the conflict within her. She could not even encounter the momentary *tête-à-tête* which before she had almost wished for. She was roused and stirred in all her being as she had never been before, able to encounter death or grief, she thought vaguely, or anything that was solemn and grand, but not ordinary talk, not compliments, not the little tender devices of courtship. She flew from the possible touch of sentiment, the half-mock, half-real flatteries that he would be ready to say to her. Love real, and great, and solemn, the Love of which the Italian poet speaks as twin sister of Death, was what Lottie's mind was prepared for; but from anything lower she fled, with the instinct of a nature highly strained and unaccustomed to, though capable of, passion. Everything was seething in her mind, her

heart beating, the blood coursing through her veins. She felt that she could not bear the inevitable downfall of ordinary talk. She ran out into the soft coolness of the night, the great quiet and calm of the sleeping place, a fugitive driven by this new wind of strange emotion. The shadow of the Abbey was grateful to her, lying dimly half-way across the broad silent road—and the dim lamp in her own window seemed to point out a refuge from her thoughts. She rushed across the empty road, like a ghost flitting, white and noiseless, and swift as an arrow, from the gate of the cloister, wondering whether the maid would hear her knock at once, or if she would have to wait there at the door till Mr. Ridsdale appeared. But the door was opened at her first touch, to Lottie's great surprise, by Law, who seemed to have been watching for her arrival. He wore a very discontented aspect, but his Lottie did not at first see, in her grateful sense of safety.

"How early you are!" he said. "I did not expect you for an hour yet. It was scarcely worth while going out at all, if you were to come back so soon."

Lottie made no reply. She went upstairs to the little drawing-room, where the lamp had been screwed as low as possible to keep alight for her when she should return. The room was still more dim than Lady Caroline's, *and looked so small* and insignificant

in comparison. On the table was a tray with some bread and butter and a cup of milk, which was Lottie's simple supper after her dissipation; for Lady Caroline's cup of tea was scarcely enough for a girl who had eaten a not too luxurious dinner at two o'clock. She had no mind, however, for her supper now; but sat down on the little sofa and covered her eyes with her hand, and went back into her thoughts, half to prolong the excitement into which she had plunged, half to still herself and get rid of this sudden transport. It would be difficult to say which she wished most; to calm herself down or to continue that state of exaltation which proved to her new capabilities in her own being. She thought it was the former desire that moved her, and that to be quiet was all she wanted; but yet that strong tide running in her veins, that hot beating of her heart, that expansion and elevation of everything in her, was full of an incomprehensible agony of sweetness and exquisite sensation. She did not know what it was. She covered her eyes to shut out the immediate scene around her. The little shabby room, the bread and butter, and Law's slouching figure manipulating the lamp—these, at least, were accessories which she had no desire to see.

"Bother the thing!" said Law, "I can't get it to burn. Here, Lottie! you can manage them. Oh! if you like to sit in the dark, I don't mind. Were your *fine* people disagreeable? I always told you they

wanted nothing but that you should sing for them and amuse them. They don't care a rap for *you!*"

Lottie took no notice of this speech. She withdrew her hand from her face, but still kept her eyes half-closed, unwilling to be roused out of her dream.

"They're all as selfish as old bears," said Law; "most people are, for that matter. They never think of you; you've got to look after yourself; it's their own pleasure they're thinking of. What can you expect from strangers when a man that pretends to be one's own father——?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Lottie, slowly waking, with a feeling of disgust and impatience, out of her finer fancies. She could not keep some shade of scorn and annoyance from her face.

"You needn't put on those supercilious looks; you'll suffer as much from it as I shall, or perhaps more, for a man can always do for himself," said Law; "but you—you'll find the difference. Lottie," he continued, forgetting resentment in this common evil, and sinking his voice, "he's down there at the old place again."

"What old place?"

As soon as his complaining voice became familiar, Lottie closed her eyes again, longing to resume her own thoughts.

"Oh! the old place. Why, down there; you know —the place where——I say!" cried Law, suddenly

growing red, and perceiving the betrayal of himself as well as of his father which was imminent. "Never mind where it is; it's where that sharp one, Polly Featherstone, works."

Lottie was completely awakened now; she looked up, half-bewildered, from the dispersing mists. "Of whom are you talking?" she cried. "Law, what people have you got among—who are they? You frighten me! Who is it you are talking of?"

"There's no harm in them," cried Law, colouring more and more. "What do you mean? Do you think they're——I don't know what you mean; they're as good as we are," he added sullenly, walking away with his hands in his pockets out of the revelations of the lamp. Dim and low as it was, it disclosed, he was aware, an uncomfortable glow of colour on his face.

"I don't know who *they* may be," said Lottie, severe, yet blushing too; "I don't want to know! But, oh, Law! you that are so young, my only brother, why should you know people I couldn't know? Why should you be ashamed of anyone you go to see?"

"I was not talking of people *I* go to see; I wish you wouldn't be so absurd; I'm talking of the governor," said Law, speaking very fast; "he's there, I tell you, a man of his time of life, sitting among a lot of girls, talking away fifteen to the dozen. He might *find* some other way of meeting her if he must meet

her!" cried Law, his own grievance breaking out in spite of him. "What has he got to do there among a pack of girls? it's disgraceful at his age!"

Law was very sore, angry, and disappointed. He had gone to his usual resort in the evening, and had seen his father there before him, and had been obliged to retire discomfited, with a jibe from Emma to intensify his trouble. "The Captain's twice the man you are!" the little dressmaker had said; "he ain't afraid of nobody." Poor Law had gone away after this, and strolled despondently along the river-side. He did not know what to do with himself. Lottie was at the Deanery; he was shut out of his usual refuge, and he had nowhere to go. Though he had no money, he jumped into a boat and rowed himself dismally about the river, dropping down below the bridge to where he could see the lighted windows of the work-room. There he lingered about, nobody seeing or taking any notice of him. When he approached the bank, he could even hear the sound of their voices, the laughter with which they received the Captain's witticisms. A little wit went a long way in that complaisant circle. He could make out Captain Despard's shadow against the window, never still for a moment, moving up and down, amusing the girls with songs, jokes, pieces of buffoonery. Law despised these devices; but, oh! how he envied the skill of the actor. He hung about the river in his boat till it *got quite dark*, almost run into

sometimes by other boats, indifferent to everything but this lighted interior, which he could see, though nobody in it could see him. And when he was tired of this forlorn amusement he came home, finding the house very empty and desolate. He tried to work, but how was it possible to work under the sting of such a recollection? The only thing he could do was to wait for Lottie, to pour forth his complaint to her, to hope that she might perhaps find some remedy for this intolerable wrong. It did not occur to him that to betray his father was also to betray himself, and that Lottie might feel as little sympathy for him as he did for Captain Despard. This fact flashed upon him now when it was too late.

Lottie had not risen from her seat, but as she sat there, everything round seemed to waver about her, then settle down again in a sudden revelation of mean, and small, and paltry life, such as she had scarcely ever realised before. Not only the lofty heaven into which the music had carried her rolled away like a scroll, but the other world, which was beautiful also of its kind, from which she had fled, which had seemed too poor to remain in, after the preceding ecstasy, departed as with a glimmer of wings; and she found herself awaking in a life where everything was squalid and poor, where she alone, with despairing efforts, tried to prop up the house that it might *not fall into* dishonoured dust. She had borne with a

kind of contemptuous equanimity Law's first story about her father. Let him marry again! she had said; if he could secure the thing he called his happiness in such a way, let him do it. The idea had filled her with a high scorn. She had not thought of herself nor of the effect it might have upon her, but had risen superior to it with lofty contempt, and put it from her mind. But this was different. With all her high notions of gentility, and all her longings after a more splendid sphere, this sudden revelation of a sphere meaner, lower still, struck Lottie with a sudden pang. A pack of girls! what kind of girls could those be of whom Law spoke? Her blood rushed to her face scorching her with shame. She who scorned the Chevaliers and their belongings! She who had "kept her distance" from her own class, was it possible that she was to be dragged down lower, lower, to shame itself? Her voice was choked in her throat. She did not feel able to speak. She could only cry out to him, clasping her hands, "Don't tell me any more—oh, don't tell me any more——"

"Hillo!" said the lad, "what is the matter with you? Don't tell you any more? You will soon know a great deal more if you don't do something to put a stop to it. There ought to be a law against it. A man's children ought to be able to put a stop to it. I told you before, Lottie, if you don't exert yourself and do something——"

"Oh," she said, rising to her feet, "what can I do? Can I put honour into you, and goodness, and make you what I want you to be? Oh, if I could, Law! I would give you my blood out of my veins if I could. But I can't put me into you," she said, wringing her hands—"and you expect me to listen to stories—about people I ought not to hear of—about women—Oh, Law, Law, how dare you speak so to me?"

"Hold hard!" said Law, "you don't know what you are speaking of. The girls are as good girls as you are—" his own cheeks flushed with indignant shame as he spoke. "You are just like what they say of women. You are always thinking of something bad. What are you after all, Lottie Despard? A poor shabby Captain's daughter! You make your own gowns and they make other people's. I don't see such a dreadful difference in that."

Lottie was overpowered by all the different sensations that succeeded each other in her. She felt herself swept by what felt like repeated waves of trouble —shame to hear of these people among whom both her father and brother found their pleasure, shame to have thought more badly of them than they deserved, shame to have betrayed to Law her knowledge that there were women existing of whom to speak was a shame. She sank down upon the sofa again trembling *and agitated,* relieved yet not relieved. "Law," she *said faintly,* "we are poor enough ourselves, I know.

But even if we don't do much credit to our birth, is it not dreadful to be content with that, to go down lower, to make ourselves nothing at all?"

"It is not my fault," said Law, a little moved, "nor yours neither. I am very sorry for you, Lottie; for you've got such a high mind—it will go hardest with you. As for me, I've got no dignity to stand on, and if he drives me to it, I shall simply 'list—that's what I shall do."

"'List!" Lottie gazed at him pathetically. She was no longer angry, as she had been when he spoke of this before. "You are out of your senses, Law! You, a *gentleman!*"

"A gentleman!" he said bitterly, "much good it does me. It might, perhaps, be of some use if we were rich, if we belonged to some great family which nobody could mistake; but the kind of gentlefolks we are! — nobody knowing anything about us, except through what *he* pleases to do and say. I tell you, if the worst comes to the worst, I will go straight off to the first sergeant I see, and take the shilling. In the Guards there's many a better gentleman than I am, and I'm tall enough for the Guards," he said, looking down with a little complacence on his own long limbs. The look struck Lottie with a thrill of terror and pain. There were soldiers enough about St. Michael's to make her *keenly and instantly* aware how perfectly *their life, as it appeared to her,* would chime in with

Law's habits. They seemed to Lottie to be always lounging about the streets stretching their long limbs, expanding their broad chests in the sight of all the serving maidens, visible in their red coats wherever the idle congregated, wherever there was any commotion going on. She perceived in a moment, as by a flash of lightning, that nothing could be more congenial to Law. What work might lie behind, what difficulties of subordination, tyrannies of hours and places, distasteful occupations—Lottie knew nothing about. She saw in her brother's complacent glance, a something of kin to the swagger of the tall fellows in their red jackets, spreading themselves out before admiring nursemaids. Law would do that too. She could not persuade herself that there was anything in him above the swagger, superior to the admiration of the maids. A keen sense of humiliation, and the sharp impatience of a proud spirit, unable to inspire those most near to it with anything of its own pride and energy, came into her mind. "You do not mind being a gentleman—you do not care," she cried. "Oh, I know you are not like me! But how will you like being under orders, Law, never having your freedom, never able to do what you please, or to go anywhere without leave? That is how soldiers live. They are slaves; they have to obey, always to obey. You could not do anything because you wanted to do it—you could not spend an evening at home—Oh," she cried

with a sudden stamp of her foot in impatience with herself, "that is not what I mean to say; for what would you care for coming home? But you could not go to that place—that delightful place—that you and papa prefer to home. I know you don't care for home," said Lottie. "Oh, it is a compliment, a great compliment to me!"

And, being overwrought and worn out with agitation, she suddenly broke down and fell a-crying, not so much that she felt the slight and the pang of being neglected, but because all these agitations had been too much for her, and she felt for the moment that she could bear no more.

At the sight of her tears sudden remorse came over Law. He went to her side and stood over her, touching her shoulder with his hand. "Don't cry, Lottie," he said, with compunction. And then, after a moment, "It isn't for you; you're always jolly and kind. I don't mind what I say to you; you might know everything I do if you liked. But home, you know, home's not what a fellow cares for. Oh, yes! I care for it in a way—I care for you; but except you, what is there, Lottie? And I can't always be talking to you, can I? A fellow wants a little more than that. So do you; you want more than me. If I had come into the drawing-room this morning and strummed on the piano, what would you have done? Sent me off or boxed my ears if I'd have let you. But that fellow

Ridsdale comes and you like it. You needn't say
I am certain you liked it. But brother and sister,
know that's not so amusing! Come, Lottie, you kn
that as well as I."

"I don't know it, it is not true!" Lottie cried, w
a haste and emphasis which she herself felt to be
necessary. "But what has that to do with the matt
Allow that you do not care for your home, Law;
is it necessary to go off and separate yourself fr
your family, to give up your position, everything?
will tell you what we will do. We will go to
Ashford, and he will let us know honestly what
thinks—what you are fit for. All examinations are
so hard; there must be something that you could d

Law made a wry face, but he did not contrac
his sister. "I wish he would cut me out with a p
of scissors and make me fit somewhere," he said, w
a shrug of his shoulders. Then he added, alm
caressingly, "Take your supper, Lottie; you're tir
and you want something; I have had mine. And
have not told me a word about to-night. Why
you come in so early? How are you and Ridsd
getting on? Oh! what's the good of making a f
about it? Do you think I can't see as plain as p
ridge what *that* means?"

"What what means?" cried Lottie, springing fr
her seat with such passionate energy as half frighter
the lad. "How dare you, Law? Do you think I

one of the girls you are used to? How dare you speak to me so?"

"Why should you make such a fuss about it?" cried Law, laughing, yet retreating. "If there is nothing between you and Ridsdale, what does the fellow want loafing about here? Lottie! I say, mind what you're doing. I don't mind taking your advice sometimes, but I won't be bullied by you."

"You had better go to bed, Law!" said Lottie, with dignified contempt. After all the agitations of the evening it was hard to be brought down again to the merest vulgarities of gossip like this. She paid no more attention to her brother, but gathered together her shawl, her gloves, the shabby little fan which had been her mother's, and put out the lamp, leaving him to find his way to his room as he could. She was too indignant for words. He thought her no better than the dressmaker-girls he had spoken of, to be addressed with vulgar stupid raillery such as no doubt they liked. This was the best Lottie had to look for in her own home. She swept out, throwing the train of her long white skirt from her hand with a movement which would have delighted Rollo, and went away to the darkness and stillness of her own little chamber, with scarcely an answer to the "Good-night" which Law flung at her as he shuffled away. She sat down on her little bed in the dark without lighting her candle; it was her self-imposed duty to

watch there till she heard her father's entrance. And there, notwithstanding her stately withdrawal, poor Lottie, overcome, sobbed and cried. She had nobody to turn to, nor anything to console her, except the silence and pitying darkness which hid her girlish weakness even from herself.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CAPTAIN DESPARD.

MORNING service at the Abbey was more business-like than the severe ritual in the afternoon. The evening prayers were more pleasurable. Strangers came to them, new faces, all the visitors about, and there could be no doubt that the Signor chose his anthems with a view to the new people who were always coming and going. Sometimes representatives from every quarter of England, from the Continent—members of "the other church" even, which Anglicanism venerates and yearns after: and people from America, pilgrims to the shrine of the past, would gather within the Abbey, and carry away the fame of the music and the beautiful church to all the winds. The staff of the Abbey was pleasantly excited, the service was short, the whole ritual was pleasurable. It was the dull hour in the afternoon when it is good for people to be occupied in such an elevating way, and when, coming in with the fresh air hanging about you in the summer, out of the sunshine, to feel the house so shady and cool—or in winter from the chill and cold out of doors to a blazing fire, and lamps, and candles, and tea—you had

just time for a little lounge before dressing for dinner, and so cheated away the heaviest hour of the day. But in the morning it was business. The Minor Canons felt it, getting up from their breakfast to sing their way steadily through litany and versicles. And nobody felt it more than the old Chevaliers as they gathered in their stalls, many of them white-headed, tottering, one foot in the grave. It was the chief occupation of their lives—all that they were now obliged to do. Their whole days were shaped for this. When the bells began the doors would open, the veterans come out, one by one, some of them battered enough, with medals on their coats. Captain Despard was the most jaunty of the brotherhood. Indeed he was about the youngest of all, and it had been thought a bad thing for the institution when a man not much over fifty was elected. He was generally the last to take his place, hurrying in fresh and debonair, with his flower in his coat, singing with the choir whenever the music pleased him, and even now and then softly accompanying the Minor Canon, with a cheerful sense that his adhesion to what was being said must always be appreciated. His responses were given with a grand air, as if he felt himself to be paying a compliment to the Divine Hearer. And indeed, though it was the great drawback of his existence to be compelled to be present *there every* morning of his life, still when he was there *he enjoyed it.* He was part of the show. The b

ful church, the fine music, and Captain Despard, had all, he thought, a share in the silent enthusiasm of the general congregation. And Captain Despard was so far right that many of the congregation, especially those who came on Sundays and holidays, the townsfolk, the tobacconists, and tradespeople, and the girls from the work-room, looked upon him with the greatest admiration, and pointed out to each other, sometimes awed and respectful, sometimes tittering behind their prayer-books, where "the Captain" sat in state. The Captain was a "fine man" everybody allowed—well proportioned, well preserved—a young man of his age; and his age was mere boyhood in comparison with many of his peers and brethren. It was ridiculous to see him there among all those old fellows, the girls said; and as for Polly, as she slipped humbly into a free seat, the sight of him sitting there in his stall quite overpowered her. If all went well, she herself would have a place there by-and-by—not in the stalls indeed, but in the humble yet dignified places provided for the families of the Chevaliers. It must not be supposed that even the Chevaliers' stalls were equal to those provided for the hierarchy of the Abbey. They were a lower range, and on a different level altogether, but still they were places of dignity. Captain Despard put his arms upon the carved supports of his official seat, and looked around him like a benevolent monarch. When anyone asked him a question as he went or

came he was quite affable, and called to the verger with a condescending readiness to oblige.

"You must find a place for this gentleman, Wykeham," he would say; "this gentleman is a friend of mine." Wykeham only growled at these recommendations, but Captain Despard passed on to his stall with the air of having secured half a dozen places at least; and his *protégés* felt a vague belief in him, even when they did not find themselves much advanced by it. And there he sat, feeling that every change in his position was noted, and that he himself was an essential part of the show—that show which was so good for keeping up all the traditions of English society, making the Church respected, and enforcing attention to religion—indeed, a very handsome compliment to the Almighty himself.

Captain Despard, however, though he admired himself so much, was not, as has been already hinted, proportionately admired by his brother Chevaliers, and it was something like a surprise to him when he found himself sought by two of them at once, as they came out of the Abbey. One of these was Captain Temple, who had encountered Lottie on the evening before, going alone to the Deanery. None of all the Chevaliers of St. Michael's was so much respected as this old gentleman. He was a little man, with white hair, not remarkable in personal appearance, poor, and old; but *he was all* that a Chevalier ought to be, *sans reproche*—

The story of his early days was the ordinary one of a poor officer without friends or interest; but in his later life there had happened to him something which everybody knew. His only daughter had married a man greatly above her in station, a member of a noble family, to the great admiration and envy of all beholders. She was a beautiful girl, very delicate and sensitive; but no one thought of her qualities in comparison with the wonderful good fortune that had befallen her. A girl that had been changed at a stroke from poor little Mary Temple, the poor Chevalier's daughter, into the Honourable Mrs. Dropmore, with a chance of a Viscountess's coronet! was ever such good luck heard of? Her father and mother were congratulated on all sides with malign exuberance. Mrs. Temple got credit for being the cleverest of mothers, that applause, which in England means insult, being largely showered upon her. Whether she deserved it, poor soul! is nothing to this history; but if so, she soon had her reward. The girl who had been so lucky was carried off summarily from the father and mother who had nothing else to care for in the world. They were not allowed to see her, or even to communicate with her but in the most limited way. They bore everything, these poor people, for their child's sake, encouraging each other not to complain, to wait until her sweetness had gained the victory, as sweetness and submission are always said to do—and en-

couraging *her* to think only of her husband, to wai and be patient until the prejudices of his family wer dispelled. But this happy moment never came fc poor Mary. She died after a year's marriage—wailin for her mother, who was not allowed to come near he and did not even know of her illness. This had a most killed the old people too—and it had pointe many a moral all the country round; and now this ir cident, which had nothing to do with her, came in t influence the career of Lottie Despard. It was Captai Temple who first came up to his brother Chevalier ; he strolled through the nave of St. Michael's, on h way out from the service. A great many people alwa lingered in the nave to get every note of the Signor voluntary, and it was Captain Despard's practice t take a turn up and down to exhibit himself in th last act of the show before it was over. The su shone in from the high line of south windows, throv ing a thousand varieties of colour on the lofty clustere pillars, and the pavement all storied with engrave stones and brasses. The Captain sauntered up an down, throwing out his chest, and conscious of a miration round him, while the music rolled fort through the splendid space, with a voice proportione to it, and groups of the early worshippers stood abo listening, specks in the vastness of the Abbey. Ju as it ended, with an echoing thunder of sweet soun the old Captain, putting on his hat at the door, e

countered the younger warrior for whom he had been lying in wait.

"May I speak a word to you, Captain Despard?" he said.

"Certainly, my dear sir; if I can be of use to you in any way, command me," said Captain Despard, with the most amiable flourish of his hat. But he was surprised; for Captain Temple was a man who "kept his distance," and had never shown any symptom of admiration for the other Chevalier.

"You will forgive me speaking," said the old man. "But I know that your evenings are often engaged. You have many occupations; you are seldom at home in the evening?"

"My friends are very kind," said Captain Despard, with another flourish. "As a matter of fact, I—dine out a great deal. I am very often engaged."

"I thought so. And your son—very often dines out too. May I ask as a favour that you will allow me to constitute myself the escort of Miss Despard when she is going anywhere in the evening? I had that pleasure last night," said the old man. "I am a very safe person, I need not say: and fond of—young people. It would be a great pleasure to me."

Captain Despard listened with some surprise. Perhaps he saw the reproach intended, but was too gaily superior to take any notice of it. When the other had ended, he took off his hat again, and made him a still

more beautiful bow. "How glad I am," he said, " be able to give you a great pleasure so easily! C tainly, Captain Temple, if my little girl's society agreeable to you."

"She is at an age when she wants—someone watch over her," said the old Captain. "She is ve sweet—and very handsome, Captain Despard."

"Is she?" said the other, indifferently. "A chi my dear sir, nothing more than a child; but go looks belong to her mother's family—without thinki of my own side of the house."

"She is very handsome. A mother is a great l to a girl at that age."

"You think it is a want that ought to be supplie said Captain Despard, with a laugh, stroking his mo tache. "Perhaps you are right—perhaps you are rig Such an idea, I allow, has several times crossed r own mind."

"Despard," said another voice, behind him, "I' got something to say to ye. When ye're at leisure, r dear fellow, step into my place."

"Don't let me detain you," said the other old m hurrying away. His kind stratagem had not succeede He was half sorry—and yet, as he had already p phesied its failure to his wife, he was not so mu displeased after all. Major O'Shaughnessy, who w a heavy personage, hobbled round to the other side.

"Despard," he said, "me dear friend! I've got something to say to you. It's about Lottie, me boy."

"About Lottie?—more communications about Lottie. I've had about enough of her, O'Shaughnessy. There is that solemn old idiot asking if he may escort her when she goes anywhere. Is he going to give his wife poison, and offer himself to me as a son-in-law?" said the Captain, with a laugh.

"I'll go bail he didn't tell you what I'm going to tell you. Listen, Despard. My pretty Lottie—she's but a child, and she's as pretty a one as you'd wish to see: well, it's a lover she's gone and got for herself. What d'ye think of that? Bless my soul, a lover! What do you make of that, me fine fellow?" cried the Major, rubbing his fat hands. He was large of bulk, like his wife, and round and shining, with a bald head, and large hands that looked bald too.

"Is this a joke?" said the Captain, drawing himself up; "by George I'll have no jokes about my child."

"Joke? it is my wife told me, that is as fond of the girl as if she were her own. 'Mark my words,' says Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, 'she'll be the Honourable Mrs. Ridsdale before we know where we are.' And Temple's been at ye, Despard; I know it. The man is off his head with his own bad luck, and can't abide the name of an Honourable. But, from all I hear, there's little to be said against this one except that he's poor."

"The Honourable——" said Captain Despard, with a bewildered look. Then, as the good Major talked, he recovered himself. "Well!" he said, when that speech came to an end, "you may think that it's very fine, O'Shaughnessy, and I'm sure I am much obliged to you for telling me, but you don't suppose an Honourable is anything out of the way to me? With her family and her beauty, I would grudge the child to a man without a title anyhow, even if he weren't poor."

The Major had his mouth open to speak, but he was so bewildered by this grandeur that he stopped and closed it again, and uttered only a murmur in his throat. "Well!" he said, when he came to himself, "you know your own affairs best; but now that your girl is taken out, and into society, and with her prospects, you'll be standing by her and giving her mor of your company, Despard? Lottie's the best of girls but it might make all the difference to her, having h father at home, and always ready to stand up for h —not meaning any offence."

"Nor is any taken, O'Shaughnessy; make y mind quite easy," said the Captain, looking extren stately though his coat was shabby. Then he ad "I've got some business down town, and an app ment at twelve o'clock. I'm sorry to hurry off, business goes before all. Good-morning to Major!" he said, kissing the ends of his fingers; turning back after he had gone a few steps. "I

spects to your wife, and thanks for finding it all out; but I've known it these three weeks at least, though I'm obliged to her all the same." And so saying, Captain Despard resumed the humming of his favourite tune, and went swinging his arm down the Dean's Walk, the rosebud in his coat showing like a decoration, and the whole man jaunty and gay as nobody else was at St. Michael's. It was a sight to see him as he marched along, keeping time to the air he was humming; a fine figure of a man! The good Major stood and looked after him dum-foundered; he was almost too much taken by surprise to be offended. "Manage your own affairs as you please, my fine fellow!" he said to himself, and went home in a state of suppressed fury. But he relented when he saw Lottie, in her print frock, at the window; and he did not give his wife that insolent message. "What is the use of making mischief?" the Major said.

Captain Despard was not, however, so entirely unmoved as he looked. The news bewildered him first, and then elated him. Where had the girl picked up the Honourable Mr. ——, what was his name? He knew so little of Lottie and was so little aware of her proceedings, that he had only heard accidentally of her visits at the Deanery at all, and knew nothing whatever of Rollo. He must inquire, he said to himself; but in the meantime did not this free him from all the hesitations with which, to do him justice, he

had been struggling? For if, instead of "presidin
over his establishment"—which was how Captain De
spard put it—Lottie was to be the mistress of a hous
of her own and ascend into heaven, as it were, as th
Honourable Mrs. Something-or-other, there would b
no doubt that Captain Despard would be left free a
the day to do what pleased himself. This wonderfu
piece of news seemed to get into his veins and sen
the blood coursing more quickly there, and into hi
head, and made that whirl with an elation which wa
perfectly vague and indefinite. With Lottie as th
Honourable Mrs. So-and-so, all obstacles were removed
out of his own way. Law did not count; the Captain
was afraid more or less of his daughter, but he wa
not at all afraid of his son. The Honourable Some
thing-or-other! Captain Despard did not even kno
his name or anything about him, but already vario
privileges seemed to gleam upon him through t
noble relation. No doubt such a son-in-law would
likely to lend a gentleman, who was not over-rich
connected with him by close family ties, a small
now and then; or probably he might think it nece
for his own dignity to make an allowance to his
father to enable him to appear as a gentleman
and in the shooting season he would naturall
tainly, give so near a relation a standing invita
*the shooting*-box which, by right of his rank, h
*inevitably* possess somewhere or other, either

or belonging to his noble father. Probably he would have it in his power to point out to Her Majesty or Commander-in-Chief that to keep a man who was an honour to his profession, like Captain Henry Despard, in the position of a Chevalier of St. Michael's, was equally a disgrace and a danger to the country. Captain Despard seemed to hear the very tone in which this best of friends would certify to his merits. "Speak of failures in arms! What can you expect when General So-and-so is gazetted to the command of an expedition, and Henry Despard is left in a Chevalier's lodge?" he seemed to hear the unknown say indignantly. Nothing could be more generous than his behaviour; he did nothing but go about the world sounding the Captain's praises: "I have the honour to be his son-in-law," this right-thinking young man would say. Captain Despard went down the hill with his head buzzing full of this new personage who had suddenly stepped into his life. His engagement was no more important than to play a game at billiards with one of his town acquaintances, but even there he could not keep from throwing out mysterious hints about some great good fortune which was about to come to him. "What! are you going away, Captain? Are you to have promotion? or is it you they have chosen for the new warden of the Chevaliers?" his associates asked him, *half in curiosity,* half in sarcasm. "I am *not in circumstances," said* the Captain solemnly, "to

say what are the improved prospects that are daw upon my house; but of this you may rest assure that my friends in adversity will remain my friend prosperity." "Bravo, Captain!" cried all his frie Some of them laughed, but some of them put t faith in Captain Despard. They said to themse "He's fond of talking a bit big, but he's got a g heart, has the Captain!" and they, too, dreame little loans and treats. And, indeed, the Captain an immediate advantage out of it; for one of billiard-players, who was a well-to-do tradesman habits not altogether satisfactory to his friends, g him a luncheon at the "Black Boar," not becaus expected to profit by the supposed promotion, bu see how many lies the old humbug would tell in l an-hour, as he himself said; for there are practical mocrats to whom it is very sweet to see the preter aristocrat cover himself with films of lying. The s keeper roared with laughter as the Captain gave f his oracular sayings. "Go it, old boy!" he said. T all believed, however, more or less, in some good that was coming, whatever it might be; and the se tion of faith around him strengthened Captain Des in his conviction. He resolved to go home and q tion Lottie after this luncheon; but that was of i a prolonged feast, and the immediate consequenc it was a disinclination to move, and a sense tha *would* be just as well for him not to show himself

some little time, "till it had gone off"—for the Captain in some things was a wise man, and prudent as he was wise.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE WORKROOM.

THERE were two factions in the workroom by the side of the river where Mrs. Wilting's daughters worked, with Polly Featherston for their forewoman. One of these, though very small and consisting, indeed, only of Ellen Wilting, the eldest girl—who was "serious"—and a little apprentice who was in her class at the Sunday School—was greatly against the intrusion of "the gentlemen" into the workroom, and thought it highly improper and a thing likely to bring all the young ladies who worked there into trouble. Ellen was, contrary to the usual opinion which would have selected the plainest sister for this *rôle*, the prettiest of the girls. She was fair-haired, but not frizzy like the rest; and her face was pale, with a serious expression which made her very lady-like, many persons thought, and gave her, the others felt not without envy, a distinction which did not belong to their own pinkness and whiteness. There were four sisters, of whom Emma—who was the object of Law's admiration—was the youngest. Kate and 'Liza came between these two, and they were both of Polly's faction, though

ithout any reason for being so. They thought Ellen as a great deal too particular. What was the harm f a gentleman came and sat a bit when they were not o busy, and talked and made them laugh? The ob- ct of life to these young women was to get as much ughing and talking as possible made consistent with ie greatest amount of work done, of gowns and bon- ts made; and anyone who made the long evening pear a little shorter, and "passed the time" with a tle merriment, was a real benefactor to them. Ellen, : her part, took more serious views of life. She would ve liked to go to morning service every day had that en practicable, and called it matins as the ladies mselves did, which was very uncommon in the River ne; and she was a member of the Choral Society, d had a pretty voice, and had sung in a chorus ng with Miss Despard, and even with Miss Hunting- a before she married. All this made her feel that was not "nice" to encourage the gentlemen who re of a different condition in life, and whose visits uld not be for any good. And she would much ther have heard stories read out of the *Monthly acket*, or something in which instruction was joined ith amusement, than from the *Family Herald*; except, deed, when she got interested in the trials, continued om number to number, of some virtuous young eroine like the Lady Araminta. Ellen wore a black own like the young ladies in the shops, with her

pretty fair hair quite simply dressed, without any of the padding and frizzing which were popular at the time; and fondly hoped some time or other to wear a little black bonnet like those of the sisters who had an establishment near. Her mother sternly forbade this indulgence now, but it was one of the things to which the young woman looked forward. And it must be allowed that Ellen rather prided herself on her total unlikeness in every way to Polly Featherston, who considered herself the head of the workroom, and who was certainly the ringleader in all its follies. Kate and 'Liza and Emma and the other apprentice, though they by no means gave their entire adhesion to Polly, and had many remarks to make upon her in private, yet were generally led by her as a person who knew the world and was "much admired," and always had somebody after her. That this somebody should be for the moment "a gentleman," gave Polly an additional advantage. It must not be supposed that her reputation was anyhow in danger, though she was known to "keep company" with the Captain; for Polly, though not "particular," and ready to talk and laugh with anyone, was known to be very well able to take care of herself, and much too experienced to be taken in by any of the admirers whom she was supposed to be able to wind round her little finger. For this, and for her powers of attracting admiration, and for her fluent and ready speech, and the dauntless disposition which

made her afraid of nobody and ready to "speak up," if need were, even to the very Dean himself, the girls admired her; and they would not be persuaded by Ellen that Polly ought to be subdued out of her loud and cheerful talk, and the doors of the workroom closed on the gentlemen. Little Emma, indeed, the youngest of the girls, was vehement against this idea, as was easily understood by all the rest.

"What is the harm?" she cried, with tears in her eyes, tears of vexation and irritation and alarmed perception of the change it would make if Law should be shut out; a terrible change, reducing herself, who now enjoyed some visionary superiority as "keeping company" in her own small person with a gentleman, into something even lower than 'Liza and Kate, who had their butchers and bakers, at least, to walk out with on Sunday—a privilege which Emma seldom dared enjoy with Law. "What is the use," Emma said, "of making a fuss? What harm do they do? They make the time pass. It's long enough anyhow from eight o'clock in the morning till nine at night, or sometimes later, and so little time as mother allows for meals. I am sure I am that tired," Emma declared, and with reason, "I often can't see how to thread my needle; and to have somebody to talk to passes the time."

"We have always plenty of talk even when we are by ourselves," said Ellen; "and I am sure we might make better use of our time and have much more im-

proving conversation if these men would not be always coming here."

"Oh! if you are so fond of improvement," cried Polly, "I daresay you would like to have Mr. Sterndale the Scripture Reader come and read to us; or we might ask Mr. Langton upstairs, who is a clergyman. I shouldn't mind having *him;* he is so shy and frightened, and he wouldn't know what to say."

"Lord!" cried Kate; "fancy being frightened for us!"

"Oh!" said the better-informed Polly, "there's heaps as are frightened for us; and the gooder they are the more frightened they would be; a curate is always frightened for us girls. He knows he daren't talk free in a friendly way, and that makes him as stiff as two sticks. As sure as fate, if he was pleasant, somebody would say he had a wrong meaning, and that's how it's always in their mind."

"A clergyman," said Ellen authoritatively, "would come to do us good. But it wouldn't be his place to come here visiting. It's our duty to go to him to relieve our consciences. As for Mr. Sterndale, the Scripture Reader, I don't call him a Churchman at all; he might just as well be a Dissenter. What good can he do anybody? The thing that really does you good is to go to church. In some places there are always prayers going on, and then there is half an hour for meditation, and then you go to work again till the bell rings.

And in the afternoon there is even-song and self-examination, and that passes the time," cried Ellen, clasping her hands. "What with matins, and meditation, and something new for every hour, the days go. They're gone before you know where you are."

The young women were silenced by this enthusiastic statement. For after all, what could be more desirable than a system which made the days fly? Polly was the only one who could hold up her head against such an argument. She did her best to be scornful. "I daresay!" she cried, "but I should just like to know if the work went as fast! Praying and meditating are very fine, but if the work wasn't done, what would your mother say?"

"Mother would find it answer, bless you," said Ellen, her pale face lighted with enthusiasm; "you do double the work when you can feel you're doing your duty, and could die cheerful any moment."

"Oh! and to think how few sees their duty, and how most folks turns their backs upon it!" replied the little apprentice, who was on Ellen's side.

Polly saw that something must be done to turn the tide. The girls were awed. They could not hold up their commonplace little heads against this grand ideal. There were little flings of half-alarmed impatience indeed among them, as when Kate whispered to 'Liza that "one serious one was enough in a house," and little Emma ventured a faltering assertion "that going

to church made a day feel like Sunday, and it didn't seem right to do any more work." Polly boldly burst in, and threw forth her standard to the wind.

"Week days is week days," she said oracularly. "We've got them to work in and to have a bit of fun as long as we're young. Sundays I say nothing against church—as much as anyone pleases; and it's a great thing to have the Abbey to go to, where you see everybody, if Wykeham the verger wasn't such a brute. But, if I'm not to have my bit of fun, I'd rather be out of the world altogether. Now I just wish Mr. Law were passing this way, for there's the end of Lady Araminta in the *Family 'Erald*, and it is very exciting, and she won't hear of marrying the Earl, let alone the Duke, but gives all her money and everything she has to the man of her heart."

"The baronet!" cried Kate and 'Liza in one breath. "I always knew that was how it was going to be." Even Ellen, wise as she was, changed colour, and looked up eagerly.

It was Polly who took in that representative of all that the world calls letters and cultivation, to these girls. Ellen looked wistfully at the drawer in which the treasure was hidden. "I will read it out if you like," she said somewhat timidly. "I can't get on with this till the trimming is ready." Thus even the Church party was vanquished by the charms of Art.

That evening the Captain again paid them a visit.

It was not often that he came two days in succession, and Emma, who was the least important of all, was very impatient of his appearance, notwithstanding the saucy speech she had made to Law. In her heart she thought there was no comparison between the father and son. The Captain was an old man. He had no business to come at all, chatting and making his jokes; it was a shame to see him turning up night after night. She wondered how Miss Despard liked to have him always out. Emma regarded Miss Despard with great interest and awe. She wondered when she met her in the street, as happened sometimes, what she would say *if she knew*. And Emma wondered, with a less warm thrill of personal feeling, but yet with much heat and sympathetic indignation, what Miss Despard would think if she knew of Polly. She would hate her, and that would be quite natural. Fancy having Polly brought in over your head in the shape of a step-mother! and if Emma herself felt indignant at such an idea, what must Miss Despard do who was a lady, and used to be the mistress? It made the girl's heart ache to think that she would have to close the door upon Law again, for it would never do to have the father and son together. Polly, on the contrary, bore a look of triumph on her countenance. She pushed her chair aside a little as Emma had done for Law, thus making room for him beside her, and she said, with a delighted yet nervous toss of her mountain of

hair, "Ah, Captain, back again! Haven't you got anything better to do than to come after a lot of girls that don't want you? Do we want him, Kate?" to which playful question Kate replied in good faith, No, she did not want him; but, with a friendly sense of what was expected of her, giggled and added that the Captain didn't mind much what *she* thought. The Captain, nothing daunted, drew in a stool close to Polly, and whispered that, by George, the girl was right; it didn't matter much to him what *she* thought; that it was someone else he would consult on that subject; upon which Polly tossed her head higher than ever, and laughed and desired him to Get along! The Captain's coming was not nearly so good for the work as Law's, who was not half so funny, and whom they all received in a brotherly sort of indifferent, good-humoured way. The Captain, on the contrary, fixed their attention as at a play. It was as good as a play to watch him whispering to Polly, and she arching her neck, and tossing her head, and bidding him Get along! Sometimes, indeed, he kept them all laughing with his jokes and his mimicries, himself enjoying the enthusiasm of his audience. But though on these occasions he was very entertaining, the girls perhaps were still more entertained when he sat and whispered to Polly, giving them the gratification of an actual romance, such as it was, enacted before their eyes. A gentleman, an officer, with such a command of fine language, and

such an air! They gave each other significant glances and little nudges to call each other's attention, and wondered what Miss Despard would think, and what would happen if really, really, some fine day Polly Featherston were made into a lady, a Chevalier's wife, and Mr. Law's stepmother—what *would* everybody say? and Miss Despard, would she put up with it? Even the idea of so exciting an event made the blood move more quickly in their veins.

The Captain was not in his jocular mood to-night. He was magnificent, a thing which occurred now and then. In this state of mind he was in the habit of telling them splendid incidents of his early days—the things he said to the Duke of Blank, and what the Duke of Blank replied to him, and the money he gave for his horses, and how he thought nothing of presenting any young lady he might be paying attention to (for he was a sad flirt in those days, the Captain allowed) with a diamond spray worth a thousand pounds, or a sapphire ring equally valuable, or some pretty trifle of that description. But he was altogether serious to-night. "I intended to have come earlier," he said, "for I have family business that calls me home soon; but I was detained. It is very tiresome to be continually called upon for advice and help as I am, especially when in one's own affairs something important has occurred."

"La, Captain, what has happened?" said Polly.

"You ought to tell us. We just want something to wake us up. You've had some money left you; or I shouldn't wonder a bit if the Commander-in-Chief——"

Here she stopped short with sudden excitement, and looked at him. Captain Despard was fond of intimating to his humbler friends that he knew the Commander-in-Chief would send for him some day, indignant with those whose machinations had made him shelve so valuable an officer for so long. It seemed possible to Polly that this moment had arrived, and the idea made her black eyes blaze. She seemed to see him at the head of an expedition, leading an army, and herself the general's lady. It did not occur to Polly that there was no war going on at the moment; that was a matter of detail; and how should she know anything about war or peace, a young woman whose knowledge of public manners was limited to murders and police cases? She let her work fall upon her knee, and there even ran through her mind a rapid calculation, if he was starting off directly, how long it would take to get the wedding things ready, or if she could trust the Wiltings to have them packed and sent after her in case there should not be time enough to wait.

"No," the Captain said, with that curl of his lip which expressed his contempt of the authorities who had so foolishly passed him over. "It is nothing about *the* Commander-in-Chief—at least not yet. There will

soon be a means of explaining matters to his Royal Highness which may lead to——. But we will say nothing on that point for the moment," he added grandly, with a wave of his hand. Then he leaned over Polly, and whispered something which the others tried vainly to hear.

"Oh!" cried Polly, listening intently. At first her interest failed a little; then she evidently rose to the occasion, put on a fictitious excitement, clasped her hands, and cried, "Oh, Captain, *that* at last!"

"Yes—that is what has happened. You may not see all its importance at the first glance. But it is very important," said the Captain with solemnity. "In a domestic point of view—and otherwise. People tell you interest does not matter now-a-days. Ha! ha!" (Captain Despard laughed the kind of stage-laugh which may be represented by these monosyllables.) "Trust one who has been behind the scenes. Interest is everything—always has been, and always will be. This will probably have the effect of setting me right at the Horse Guards, which is all that is necessary. And in the meantime," he added, with a thoughtful air, "it will make a great difference in a domestic point of view; it will change my position in many ways, indeed in every way."

Polly had been gazing at him during this speech, watching every movement of his face, and as she watched her own countenance altered. She did not

even pretend to take up her work again, but leaned forward nervously fingering the thread and the scissors on the table, and beginning to realise the importance of the crisis. To Captain Despard it was a delightful opportunity of displaying his importance, and there was just enough of misty possibility in the castle of cards he was building up to endow him with a majestic consciousness of something about to happen. But to Polly it was a great deal more than this. It was the crisis of something that was at least melodrama, if not tragedy, in her life. All her hopes were suddenly quickened into almost reality, and the change in her fortunes, which had been a distant and doubtful if exciting chance, seemed suddenly in a moment to become real and near.

The spectacle that this afforded to the other young women in the workroom it is almost beyond the power of words to describe. Their bosoms throbbed. A play! plays were nothing to it. They pulled each other's gowns under the table. They gave each other little nods, and looks under their eyebrows. Their elbows met in emphatic commentary. He, absorbed in his own all-important thoughts, she looking up at him with that rapt and pale suspense—never was anything more exciting to the imagination of the beholders "He won't look at her," one whispered; "she's all of a tremble," said another; and "Lord, what *are* they making such a fuss about?" breathed Kate.

"Yes, it will alter our position in every way," the Captain said, stroking his moustache, and fixing his eyes on vacancy. Then Polly touched his arm softly, her cheek, which had been pale, glowing crimson. *Our* position! the word gave her inspiration. She touched him shyly at first to call his attention; then, with some vehemence, "Captain! that will make——a deal easier," she said; but what words were between these broken bits of the sentence, or if any words came between, the excited listeners could not make out.

"Yes," he said with dignity. But he did not look at her. He maintained his abstracted look, which was so very impressive. They all hung upon, not only his lips, but every movement. As for Polly, the suspense was more than she could bear. She was not a patient young woman, nor had she been trained to deny herself like Ellen, or control her feelings as women in a different sphere are obliged to do. She resumed her work for a moment with hurried hands, trying to control her anxiety; then suddenly threw it in a heap on the table, without even taking the trouble to fold it tidily. She did not seem to know what she was doing, they all thought.

"I am going home," she said, with a hoarseness in her voice. "There is nothing very pressing, so it won't matter. I've got such a headache I don't know what to do with myself."

"Oh, Polly, a headache! that's not like you—yes, there's Mrs. Arrowsmith's dress that was promised."

"I don't care—and she's not a regular customer. And it's only a bit of an alpaca with no trimmings—you can finish it yourselves. Captain, if you're coming my way, you can come—if you like; unless," said Polly, with feverish bravado, "you've got something to say to the girls more than you seem to have to me—I'm going home."

The Captain woke up from his abstraction, and looked round him, elevating his eyebrows. "Bless my heart, what is the matter?" he said. And then he made a grimace, which tempted the girls to laugh notwithstanding Polly's tragic seriousness. "I had hoped to have contributed a little to the entertainment of the evening, my dear young ladies. I had hoped to have helped you to 'pass the time,' as you say. But when a lady bids me go——"

"Oh, you needn't unless you like," cried Polly; "don't mind me! I don't want nobody to go home with me. I can take care of myself—only leave me alone if you please. I won't be made fun of, or taken off. Let me out into the fresh air, or I think I shall faint." The Captain took an unfair advantage of the excited creature. He turned round upon them all when Polly rushed out to get her jacket and hat, which hung in the hall, and "took her off" on the spot, making himself so like her, that it was all they could do

to keep from betraying him by their laughter. When she had put on her "things," she put her head into the room she had just left. "Good-night, I'm going," she said, with a look of impassioned anxiety and trouble. She was too much absorbed in her own feelings to see through the mist in which their faces shone to her, the laughter that was in them. She only saw the Captain standing up in the midst of them. Was he coming after her? or was he going to fall off from her at this crisis of his affairs? Perhaps it was foolish of her to rush off like this, and leave him with all these girls about him. But Polly had never been used to restrain her feelings, and she could not help it she vowed to herself. Everything in the future seemed to depend upon whether he came after her or not. Oh, why could not she have had a little more patience! oh, why should not he come with her, say something to her after all that had passed! As great a conflict was in her mind as if she had been a heroine of romance. The Captain and she had been "keeping company" for a long time. He had "kept off" others that would not have shilly-shallyed as he had done. A man's "intentions" are rarely inquired into in Polly's sphere. But if he cared for her the least bit, if he had any honour in him, she felt that he would follow her now. Polly knew that she might have been Mrs. Despard long ago if she had consented to be married privately as the Captain wished. But she was for none

of those clandestine proceedings. She would be married in her parish church, with white favours and a couple of flys, and something that might be supposed to be a wedding breakfast. She had held by her notions of decorum stoutly, and would hear of no hole-and-corner proceedings. And now when fortune was smiling upon them, when his daughter had got hold of someone (this was Polly's elegant way of putting it), and when the way would be clear, what if he failed her? The workroom with its blaze of light and its curious spectators had been intolerable to her, but a cold shudder crossed her when she got out of doors into the darkness of the lane. Perhaps she ought to have stayed at any cost, not to have left him in the midst of so many temptations. Her heart seemed to sink into her shoes. Oh, why had she been so silly! Her hopes seemed all dropping, disappearing from her. To sink into simple Polly Featherston, with no dazzling prospect of future elevation, would be death to her, she felt, now.

Polly was half way up the lane before the Captain, coming along at his leisure, made up to her; and what with passion and fright, she had scarcely any voice left. "Oh, you have come after all!" was all she could manage to say. And she hurried on, so rapidly that he protested. "If you want to talk, how can we talk if we race like this?" he said. "Who wants to talk?" cried Polly breathless; but nevertheless she

paused in her headlong career. They went up the hill together, on the steep side next the Abbey, where there never was anybody, and there the Captain discoursed to Polly about his new hopes. She would have liked it better had he decided how the old ones were to be realised. But still, as he was confidential and opened everything to her as to his natural confidant, her excitement gradually subsided, and her trust in him returned. She listened patiently while he recounted to her all the results that would be sure to follow, when an influential son-in-law, a member of a noble family, brought him to the recollection of the Commander-in-Chief.

"They think I'm shelved and superannuated," he said; "but let me but have an opening—all I want is an opening; and then you can go and select the handsomest phaeton and the prettiest pair of ponies, my lady—"

Polly laughed and reddened with pleasure at this address, but she said prudently, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. I wouldn't give up being a Chevalier. It's a nice little house and a nice little income too."

"Pooh! a nothing," cried the Captain. This was very fine and gave a sense of superiority and exaltation. Polly could not but allow a vision to float before her eyes of the phaeton and the ponies, nay more, of the march of a regiment with the flags and the

music. She even seemed to see the sentry at her door, and all the men presenting arms as she pa (what less could they do to the wife of their mander?). But, on the other hand, to live her Michael's where she was born, and be seen in her estate by all the people who had known her as a dressmaker, that was a happiness which she did like to give up, even for the glories of a high comr far away.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ROMANCE AND REALITY.

Lottie was entirely unconscious of the intimation that had been made to her father, and of the excitement which had risen among her neighbours about Mr. Ridsdale. It did not occur to her that anyone but herself knew anything about him. The delighted curiosity of the O'Shaughnessys and the anxious concern of Captain Temple were equally unknown to her. Her mind was still moved by an echo of the sentiment of their last meeting—a thrill of emotion half from the music, half from the awakening feelings, the curiosity, the commotion of her developing nature. Of all Law's communications which had excited himself so powerfully, and which had also to some extent excited her, she remembered little in comparison. The large dim room at the Deanery, the faint night air breathing about, blowing the flames of the candles, the moths that circled about the lights and did themselves to death against every flame, seemed to glimmer before her eyes continually—everything else, even the danger of her father's marriage, the danger of Law's imprudence, fell *into the background* and became distant;

everything receded before the perpetual attractio this shadowy scene.

Mr. Ridsdale made a second call upon her in morning after service, just at the moment when ( tain Temple and Major O'Shaughnessy were talkin her father. This time he brought no note, and no excuse ready to explain his visit. "I came to good-by," he said, holding out his hand and loo rather wistfully into her face. Lottie offered him hand demurely. She scarcely met his eyes. Her h began to beat as soon as she heard his voice as for her at the door. It brought back all the terro the previous night. She did not however ask hi sit down, but stood faltering opposite to him, em rassed, not knowing what to do.

"You would not accept my escort last night," said; "I was dreadfully disappointed when I came and found you gone. I had been waiting, not wis to hurry you. I hope you did not think I was a gard?"

"Oh no, it was my fault," said Lottie, not rai her eyes. "There was no need for anyone to c with me. It is but two steps, and at that hour t is no one about. There was no need—for any esc

"May I sit down for a few minutes, Miss Desp My train is not till one o'clock."

Lottie blushed crimson at this implied repro *It might* be right to be shy of him, but not to be r

to him. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, pointing to a chair.

"You took us all by surprise last night," he said, carefully placing hers for her. "I think it was a revelation to everybody. We hear that music in the Abbey, and we suppose we understand it; till someone like you suddenly interprets it to us, and we wake up and feel that we never heard it before."

"I never knew what it was—to sing anything like that before," said Lottie. It disturbed her even to think about it; "and it had all been so different—so——"

"Commonplace? from the ridiculous to the sublime; from poor dear Aunt Caroline on her sofa to Handel fluting among the angels. It *was* a step indeed."

"I did not mean that. It was myself I was thinking of—I had been so full of silly fancies of my own."

"But all at once the inspiration came? I should like to be capable of anything like that; but I am not. I can only listen, and worship," said Rollo. There was fervour in his voice—a real something which was not mere fanaticism about music. And the two young people sat for a few moments in silence, a most dangerous thing to do, looking at each other—nay, not looking at each other—for Lottie did not feel either able or disposed to raise her eyes. She was the first to speak, in order to break the silence, which alarmed her, though she did not know why.

"It is wonderful how the Signor plays. I never understood it in the Abbey. He seems to place you up somewhere above yourself—and make your voice come independent of you."

"Never in his life, I am sure, did he have such a beautiful compliment paid to him," said Rollo; "but, Miss Despard, you do him too much credit. You permitted even me to accompany you—and sang just as divinely——"

"Oh no," said Lottie. Then she blushed and recollected herself. "You play very well, Mr. Ridsdale; but we could not compare those trumpery songs with——"

"Trumpery songs! only Mozart and Bellini, and a few more," he cried, with a gasp. "Ah, I know what you mean; you meant the 'Marta' song, which made your good friend, that good woman, cry——"

"I like the 'Last Rose of Summer' very much. I have always liked it. I used to hear an old fiddler play it in the street when I was a child, when I was lying in the dark, trying to go to sleep. It was like a friend keeping me company; but a friend that had a breaking heart, that cried and took all my thoughts off myself—I shall never forget it," said Lottie, the tears coming to her eyes at the recollection. "I like it better than all the rest."

"Miss Despard, do not drive me to despair. Not *better than* 'Casta Diva,' or Margaret's song, or——"

"You forget I don't know where they come, nor the meaning of them," said Lottie, calmly. "I never heard an opera. I think these things are beautiful, but they only sing to my ear, they don't come in to *me*."

Rollo shook his head. He was half touched, half shocked. It was her ignorance; but then a woman destined for a prima donna, a woman with musical genius, *ought* to know the best by intuition, he thought. All the same, he was more interested than if she had raved as the commonplace, half educated amateur raves. "But Handel does," he said.

"Ah!" Lottie cried, her face lighting up. But she added, after a moment, "I am too ignorant to be worth talking to; you will be disgusted. I never thought much about Handel. It was not Handel, it was *that*." A flush of colour came over her face with the recollection. She was too uninstructed (notwithstanding the neighbourhood of the Abbey) to have fully woke up to Handel or anyone. "I suppose I have heard it and did not pay much attention to it," she said; "it was singing it. One does not understand at first—till suddenly one hears one's self, and you say, 'What is this that is speaking; what is this? it cannot be *me*!'"

"I think I understand—a little," said Rollo doubtfully; "though it is simply *you* that makes a something quite familiar, a piece of music we have all heard a hundred times, become a new revelation to us all in a

moment. I am going away, Miss Despard, and it may be some time before I return. Would you do me such a great favour—which I have no right to ask—as to sing me something now before I go?"

But Lottie would not sing. She said, "Oh no, no," with a half terror which he did not understand, and which she did not understand herself. The tone was one which forbade the repetition of the request. He begged her pardon anxiously, and there was a little languid conversation about other subjects, and then he rose. He put out his hand again, looking into her eyes, which she raised shyly, almost for the first time. Rollo had a way of looking into the eyes of women to whom he wished to make himself agreeable. It is sometimes very impertinent, and always daring, but, especially when the woman's imagination is on the side of the gazer, it is very efficacious. Lottie was entirely inexperienced, and she trembled under this look, but felt it penetrate to her very heart.

"Till we meet again," he said, with a smile, holding her hand for that necessary moment while he said his good-by. "It will not be very long; and I hope that you will be kind to me, Miss Despard, and let me hear you——"

"Good-by," said Lottie. She could not bear it any longer. She blamed herself afterwards for being rude, as she sat down and went over the incident again and *again.* She seemed to herself to have dismissed him

quite rudely, pulling her hand away, cutting short what he was saying. But Rollo, for his part, did not feel that it was rude. He went down the narrow stairs with his heart beating a little quicker than usual, and a sense that here was something quite fresh and novel, something not like the little flirtations with which he was so familiar, and which amused him a great deal in general. This he had just touched, floated over with his usual easy sentiment, was something quite out of the common. It startled him with the throb in it. He went away quite thoughtful, his heart in a most unusual commotion, and forgot until he was miles away from St. Michael's that Lottie Despard was to be the English prima donna, who was to make his fortune, if properly managed. "Ah, to be sure, that was it!" he said to himself suddenly in the railway carriage, as he was going to town. He really had forgotten what it was that took him to town at this unsuitable moment of the year.

The rest of the morning glided dreamily away after an incident like this; and it was not till late in the afternoon that Lottie suddenly awoke to the necessity of making an effort, and shaking off the empire of dreams: and this was how she became convinced of the necessity for doing so. She had been sitting, as on the former occasion, with a basket of mending by her when Rollo came in. She had all the clothes of the household *to keep in order*, and naturally they

were not done in one day. After Mr. Ridsdale was gone, she took up her work languidly, keeping it on her knee while she went over all that had happened, again and again, as has been recorded. When, at last startled by a sound outside, she began to work in earnest, then and there a revelation of a character totally distinct from that made by Handel burst upon her. It was not a revelation of the same kind, but it was very startling. Lottie found—*that she had not yet finished the hole in the sock which she had begun to mend before Mr. Ridsdale's first visit!* She was still in the middle of that one hole. She remembered exactly where she stuck her needle, in the middle of a woolly hillock, as she heard him coming upstairs; and there it was still, in precisely the same place. This discovery made her heart jump almost as much as Mr. Ridsdale's visit had done. What an evidence of wicked idling, of the most foolish dreaming and unprofitable thought was in it! Lottie blushed, though she was alone, to the roots of her hair, and seizing the sock with an impassioned glow of energy, never took breath till the stern evidence of that hole was done away with. And then she could not give herself any rest She felt her dreams floating about her with folde pinions, ready to descend upon her and envelope h in their shadow if she gave them the chance; but s was determined that she would not give them t *chance.* As soon as she had finished the pair of so

and folded them carefully up, she went to look for Law to suggest that they should go immediately to Mr. Ashford. Law had only just come in from a furtive expedition out of doors, and had scarcely time to spread his books open before him when she entered his room. But he would not go to Mr. Ashford. It was time enough for that, and he meant in the meantime to "work up" by himself, he declared. Lottie became more energetic than ever in the revulsion of feeling, and determination not to yield further to any vanity. She pleaded with him, stormed at him, but in vain. "At the worst I can always 'list," he said, half in dogged resistance to her, half in boyish mischief to vex her. But he would not yield to her desire to consult Mr. Ashford, though he had assented at first. He did not refuse to go "some time," but nothing that she could say would induce him to go now. This brought in again all the contradictions and cares of her life to make her heart sore when she turned back out of the enchanted land in which for a little while she had been delivered from these cares. They all came back upon her open-mouthed, like wild beasts, she thought. Law resisting everything that was good for him, and her father——. But Lottie could not realise the change that threatened to come upon her through her father. It seemed like the suggestion of a dream. Law must be deceived, it must be all a delusion, it was not possible, it was not credible. The Captain came in early

that night, and he came upstairs into the little drawing-room, to which he had no habit of coming. He told his daughter in a stately way that he heard her singing had given great satisfaction at the Deanery. "More than one person has mentioned it to me," he said; "that is of course a satisfaction. And—who is the gentleman you have been having here so much?"

"There has been no one here very much," said Lottie; then she blushed in spite of herself, though she did not suppose that was what he alluded to. "You do not mean Mr. Ridsdale?" she said.

"How many visitors have you got?" he said, in high good humour. "Perhaps it is Mr. Ridsdale—Lady Caroline's nephew? Ah, I like the family. It was he you sang to? Well, no harm; you've got a very pretty voice—and so had your mother before you," the Captain added, with a carefully prepared sigh.

"It was only once," said Lottie, confused. "Mrs. O'Shaughnessy was here; it was after we had been singing at the Deanery; it was——"

"My child," said the Captain, "I am not finding fault. No harm in putting your best foot foremost. I wish you'd do it a little more. At your age you ought to be thinking about getting married. And, to tell the truth, it would be a great convenience to me, and suit my plans beautifully, if you would get married.

You mustn't stand shilly-shallying; let him come to the point: or, if he won't, my dear, refer him to me."

"I don't know what you mean," cried Lottie. Fortunately for her, he had thought her a child up to the time of their migration to St. Michael's, and she had been subjected to very little advice of this description. But, though she gazed at him with wondering eyes, she knew very well by the instinct of horror and repulsion in her mind what he meant. It gave her a shock of pain and shame which ran like electricity to her very finger points. "I think you must be making a mistake," she said. "I scarcely know Mr. Ridsdale at all. He has called here twice—on business—for Lady Caroline—and now he has gone away."

"Gone away!" the Captain said, his face lengthening with disappointment and dismay; "gone away! then you're a fool—a greater fool than I thought you. What's to become of you, do you ever ask yourself? Good lord, what a chance to throw away! One of the Courtland family—a fellow with a turn for music—that you could have turned round your little finger! And to let him go away! By George," said the Captain, making a stride towards her, and clenching his fist in the energy of his disapproval, "I don't believe you're any child of mine. Clever—you think you're clever? and so did your mother, poor woman! but you're an idiot, that is what you are—an idiot! to let

such a chance slip through your fingers. Good lord! to think such a fool should be a child of mine!"

Lottie stood her ground firmly. She was not afraid of the clenched fist, nor even of the angry voice and eyes, which were more genuine. If there was a slight tremor in her, it was of her own excited nerves. She made no reply; if she had spoken, what could she have done but express her own passionate loathing for his advice, and for his disapproval, and perhaps even for himself? for she had not been brought up to reverence the faulty father, whose evil qualities her mother had discussed in Lottie's presence as long as she could remember. There had not been any illusion in his children's eyes after their babyhood, in respect to Captain Despard, and perhaps in the present emergency this was well. She stood and met his fury, pale, but more disdainful than desperate. It was no more than she would have expected of him had she ever thought of the emergency at all.

Law had heard the sound of the battle from afar; he heard his father's voice raised, and the sound of the stroke upon the table with which he had emphasised one of his sentences. It was a god-send to the unenthusiastic student to be disturbed by anything, and he came in sauntering with his hands in his pockets, partly with the intention of taking Lottie's part, partly for the sake of "the fun," whatever it might be. "What's the row?" he asked. He had slippers on,

and shuffled along heavily, and his coat was very old and smelt of tobacco, though that was a luxury in which Law could indulge but sparingly. He had his hands in his pockets, and his hair was well rubbed in all directions by the efforts he had made over his unbeloved books. Thus it was but a slovenly angel that came to Lottie's aid. He stopped the yawn which his "reading" had brought on, and looked at the belligerents with some hope of amusement. "I say, don't bully Lottie," he exclaimed, but not with any fervour. He would not have allowed anyone to lay a finger upon her, but a little bullying, such as she administered to him daily, that perhaps would do Lottie no harm. However, he was there in her defence if things should come to any extremity. She was of his faction, and he of hers; but yet he thought a little bullying of the kind she gave so liberally might do Lottie no harm.

"Go away, Law; it is no matter; it is nothing. Papa was only communicating some of his ideas—forcibly," said Lottie, with a smile of defiance; but as there was always a fear in her mind lest these two should get into collision, she added hastily, "Law, I don't want you—go away."

"He can stay," said the Captain. "I have something to say to you both. Look here. I thought in the first place that she had hit off something for herself," he said, turning half round to his son. "I thought she had caught that fellow, that Ridsdale;

from what I had heard, I thought that was certain—that there would be no difficulty on that side."

The Captain had left his original ground. Instead of reproaching Lottie, in which he was strong, he was in the act of disclosing his own intentions, and this was much less certain ground. He looked at Law, and he wavered. Big lout! he knew a great deal too much already. Captain Despard looked at Law as at a possible rival, a being who had been thrust into his way. The workroom had no secrets from Law.

"I think the governor's right there," said Law confidentially; "he's a big fish, but he's all right if you give him time."

A gleam of sudden fury blazed over Lottie's face. She, too, clenched her hands passionately. She stamped her foot upon the floor. "How dare you?" she said, "how dare you insult me in my own home, you two men? Oh, yes, I know who you are—my father and my brother, my father and my brother! the two who ought to protect a girl and take care of her! Oh! is it not enough to make one hate, and loathe and despise—!" said Lottie, dashing her white clenched hand into the air. Tears that seemed to burn her came rushing from her eyes. She looked at them with wild indignation and rage, in which there was still a certain appeal. How could they, how could they shame a girl so? They looked at her for a moment in this rage, which was so impotent and so pitiful, and

then they gave a simultaneous laugh. When an exhibition of passionate feeling does not overawe, it amuses. It is so ludicrous to see a creature crying out, weeping, suffering for some trifle which would not in the least affect ourselves. Lottie was struck dumb by this laugh. She gave a startled look up at them through those hot seas of salt scalding tears that were in her eyes.

"What a fool you are making of yourself!" said the Captain. "Women are the greatest fools there are on this earth, always with some high-flown rubbish or other in their stupid heads. Your own home! and who made it your home, I should like to know? I don't say you hadn't a right to shelter when you were a little thing; but that's long out of the question. A girl of twenty ought to be thinking about getting herself a real home of her own. How are you going to do it? that's the question. You are not going to stay here to be a burden upon me all your life; and what do you mean to do?"

"I will go to-morrow!" cried Lottie, wildly; "I would go to-night if it were not dark. I will go—and free you of the burden!" Here she stopped; all the angry colour went out of her face. She looked at them with great wide eyes, appalled; and clasped her hands together with a lamentable cry. "Oh! but I never thought of it before, I never thought of it!" she cried; "where am I to go?"

Law's heart smote him; he drew a step nearer to her. To agree with his father (however much in his heart he agreed with his father) was abandoning his sister—and his own side. "He doesn't mean it," he said soothingly in an undertone; "he only wants to bully you, Lottie. Never mind him, we'll talk it over after," and he put his big hand upon her shoulder to console her. Lottie turned upon him, half furious, half appealing. She could not see him till two big tears fell out of her eyes, and cleared her sight a little. She clutched at the hand upon her shoulder in her distraction and despair.

"Come with me, Law. Two of us together, we can go anywhere; two can go anywhere. Oh! how can you tell me never to mind? Do you hear me?" she cried, seizing his arm with both her hands, half shaking him, half clinging to him; "say you will come with me, Law!"

"Stop this stuff!" said the Captain. "I am not telling you to go; I am telling you what is your plain duty, the only thing a woman is fit for. Besides, this young fellow would be of great use to me; it's your duty to get hold of him for the good of the family. He might say a good word for me at the Horse Guards; he might get Law something. I never expected you would have such a chance. Do you think I want you to go away just when there's a chance that you might be of some use? Am I a fool, do you

think? You'll stay where you are, Lottie Despard! you'll not go disgracing your family, governessing, or anything of that sort."

"Ah!" said Law suddenly, "she'll wish she had listened to the Signor now."

"To the Signor? what of the Signor? is he after her too?" cried the Captain eagerly. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; and though the Signor had no interest with the Horse Guards, he had money, and might be of use in many ways. Captain Despard's eyes lighted up. "Whew!" he whistled. "Lottie! so, my child, you've got two strings to your bow?"

Lottie turned upon her brother, whose arm she had been holding with both her hands. She pushed him, flung him from her with an energy of which she had not appeared capable, and throwing her head high, looked her father in the face and walked out of the room. Law, confounded by the force with which she threw him from her, caught at her angrily as she passed; but she pulled her dress from his hand, and walked past him with a contempt that stung him—callous as he was. As for the Captain, he made no effort to detain her, partly beause of his surprise, partly that he was anxious to have more information about (as he supposed) this second suitor. She went straight to her own room, while they stood listening till she had shut the door upon herself and her passion. Then the Captain *ventured* to laugh again, but

low, not to be heard; for the look of any creature driven to bay is alarming, and Lottie's sudden withdrawal was a relief.

"Whoever gets her will catch a Tartar! eh, Law?" he said. "But now that she's gone, let's hear all about the Signor."

There was no light in Lottie's room; nothing but the faint starlight outside, and as much of the familiar glimmer of the few feeble lamps in the Dean's Walk as could get in through her small window. How is it that so small a bit of space, such four straight walls, should hold in such a throbbing, palpitating, agitated being, with projects wide enough and fury hot enough to burst them like a child's toy? It was in her to have torn her hair or anything that came in the way of her fevered hands; to have filled the air with cries; to have filled the whole world with her protest against the intolerable shame and wretchedness which they were trying to force upon her thoughts! But she only threw herself on her bed in the dark and silence, letting no sound or movement betray her. She was not prostrated as by unkindness, or stung by reproach; but wounded, shamed, desecrated—the very sanctity of her dreams turned into a horror to her. And Law gone against her—Law gone over to the other side!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SIGNOR'S HOUSEHOLD.

THE Despard family became a great centre of interest to many people both within and without the Abbey precincts at this period of their history. Without any doing, so to speak, of theirs, Fate mixed them up both with the great and the small, so that their proceedings moved a great many circles of thought and feeling beyond that in which they themselves stood. We have said without any doing of theirs—but this, perhaps, is true only in respect to Lottie, who took no steps consciously to produce the *rapprochement* which had taken place so strangely between the heaven of the Deanery and the earth of the Lodges. She had not done anything to recommend herself to Lady Caroline or Lady Caroline's nephew. And yet with both she had become an important "factor," to use a fashionable term, in the immediate concerns of life. The Captain was not so innocent of purpose in the commotion he had begun to make. But still he had not calculated upon the interest that would be excited by his proceedings. The community at St. Michael's was quiet and had little to rouse its interest. Sometimes a Canon would be translated to a higher and a better stall—sometimes an old Chevalier would die and be replaced by another veteran not much less

old than he—sometimes a son would "go wrong" and create a great deal of whispered communication and shaking of heads. At the present time there were no daughters to marry except Lottie, so that the pleasanter strain of possibility was little thought of. All this made it very inspiring, very agitating to the dwellers round the Abbey, when a family within the precincts gave them so much to think about. A girl likely to make a very good match in a romantic way: a man likely to make a very bad one, in a way which might have been quite as romantic had it not been on the wrong side, such as would debase, not exalt his class; these two probabilities coming together had a great effect upon the popular mind. In the Chevaliers' Lodges there was very little else talked about. Captain Temple, the most respected of all the Chevaliers, could not keep still, so excited was he. He had spoken to "the father," he told his wife, to put him on his guard, and to show him how necessary it was to take proper care of his child. That was all he could do: but he could not content himself with thus doing what he could. He paced about his little sitting-room, disturbing Mrs. Temple at her wool-work. She was not like her husband. She was a still, composed, almost stern woman, with a passionate heart, to which she gave very little expression. She could not talk of her daughter as Captain Temple could. The remembrance of the years during which her child was separated

from her was terrible to her. When her husband talked as he was accustomed to do of this great grief of theirs, she never stopped him, but she herself was dumb. She closed all her windows, as it were, and retired into a fortress of silent anguish, out of which no cry came; but she listened to him all the same. This was what she did now, though it pained her to hear of this other girl who stood between life and death, between good and evil, as once her child had stood. She would have helped Lottie with all her heart, but she could not bear to hear her talked of—though this was precisely what she had to bear.

"I told him it was his duty to look after his daughter," said Captain Temple, pacing—three steps one way, four the other—about the room. "But he won't—you will see he won't. A beautiful girl, far too good for him, a girl who deserves a better fate. She puts me in mind of our own dear girl, Lucy. I have told you so before."

To this Mrs. Temple made no reply. He had told her so a great many times before. She selected a new shade of her Berlin wool, and set her elbow rigidly against the arm of her chair, that she might thread her needle without trembling, but she made no reply.

"She puts me constantly in mind of her. The way she holds her head, and her walk, and—— I beg your pardon, my dear. I know you don't like this kind of talk; but *if you* knew how I seem to see

her wherever I go—wherever I go! I wonder if she is permitted to come and walk by her old father's side, God bless her. Ah! well, it was Despard's daughter we were talking of. To think *he* should have this girl who takes no care of her—and we to whom ours was everything!"

The poor woman made a spasmodic movement, and turned her eyes upon him dumbly. She could not bear it. The needle fell out of her hands, and she stooped to hunt for it on the carpet. She would not stop him to whom it was so great a relief to talk; but it was death to her.

"But I told him," said Captain Temple. "I showed him his duty, Lucy. I told him he ought to be thankful he had such a daughter to watch over. And what more could I do? I set the whole thing before him. There was nothing more that I could do?"

"Then you must be satisfied, William, and perhaps it will have some effect; we must wait and see," said Mrs. Temple, coming to the surface again with her needle, which she had found, in her hand. She managed to get it threaded this time with great exertion, while her husband set off again upon his restricted promenade, shaking his white head. Captain Temple, it may be recollected, had not said so much to Captain Despard as he thought he had said—but if he had said everything that man could say it is not *probable* that it would have made much difference. The kind old Chevalier shook his white head. His

eyes were full of moisture and his heart of tenderness. He did not feel willing to wait and see, as his wife suggested. He wanted to do something there and then for Lottie, to go to her and warn her, to keep watch at her door, and prevent the entrance of the wolf—anything, he did not mind what it was so long as he could secure her safety.

The other subject was discussed that same evening in another and very different scene, when Mrs. Purcell, the Signor's housekeeper, asked her old fellow-servant, Pickering, what news there was in the precincts, and if anything was stirring. It was the most delicious moment for a gossip, when tea was over in the kitchen, and dinner upstairs, and twilight was beginning to drop over the country, bringing quiet and coolness after the blaze of the day. Mrs. Purcell sat by the open window, which was cut in the very boundary wall of the Abbey precincts, as in the side of a pre-ipice. It was not safe for anyone of uncertain nerves ) look straight down upon the slope of St. Michael's ill, on which the walls were founded, and on the ep street winding below. But Mrs. Purcell had her rves in the most steady and well-regulated condition. : was not afraid to sit at the head of the precipice, even to look out and look down when the shop lows began to be lighted. She liked to see the s *coming out below.* It was cheerful and felt *"company" when she* sat alone. Old Pickering

had just come in after an errand into the town. He was the man-servant, while she was the housekeeper, but the work of the establishment was chiefly done by a sturdy young woman who was under the orders of both.

"News—I don't know much about news," said old Pick. "It wants young folks to make news; and there ain't many of that sort about here."

"Dear!" said Mrs. Purcell (but it must not be supposed that this exclamation meant any special expression of affection to old Pickering). "There's heaps of young folks! There's the Signor, and there's my John——"

"Master? you may call him young, if it don't go again your conscience—my notion is as he never was no younger than he is now. So you may put what name to it you please. But you don't ask me for news of master, nor Mr. John neither—him, oh ah——, there'll be news of him one of these days. He'll ge——t a cathedral, or he'll be had up to London. We'll se him, with his baton in his hand, afore the bigges——t chorus as can be got together; and won't he lead 'er——n grand!" said old Pick. "When he was but a litt——e thing in his white surplice I seen it in his eye."

"You were always one that did my John justice," said the housekeeper, warmly. "Just to think of it, Pick—one day a bit of a mite in his surplice, and the next, as you may say, with his baton, leading the chief in the land! We bring children into the world, but *we can't* tell what's to come of them," she added, with

s melancholy. "Them as is fortunate shouldn't be
ıd. The young men as I've seen go to the bad
ɜ I've been here!"

'That should be a real comfort to you," said
ering, and they paused both, to take full advantage
ıis consolation. Then, drawing a long breath, Mrs.
ɜell resumed—

"And so it should, Pick—when I see my boy that
ectable, and as good as any gentleman's son, and
ct on what I've seen! But pride's not for the like of
-seeing the Lord can bring us low as fast as He's
us up." The good woman dropped her voice,
ı that curious dread lest envious fate should
her satisfaction amiss, which seems inherent in
ıanity. As for old Pick, sentiment was not in his
. He took up a little old-fashioned silver salver
ɜh stood on the table with some notes upon it,
ing the sound of the Signor's bell, and began to
ɜh it with his handkerchief. "Them girls," he
, "there's no trust to be put in them. The times
told her to be careful with my plate. She says
haven't the time, but you and me knows better
ı that. What is there to do in this house? We
s no trouble, and as for master, he's dining out
his time."

"She'll find the difference," said Mrs. Purcell,
ıen she's under a lady. There's many a thing I
s myself. Instead of calling Maryanne till I'm

hoarse, I takes and does it myself; but a lady will never do that. Ah, Pick, it's experience as teaches. They don't put any faith in what we tell them; and her head full of soldiers, and I don't know what—as if a soldier ever brought anything but harm to a servant girl."

"They are all alike," said old Pick. "There's them Despards in the Lodges—all the Abbey's talking of them. The Captain—you know the Captain? the one as sings out as if it all belonged to him—though he's neither tenor, nor alto, nor bass, but a kind of a umble, and as often as not sings the air!" said the old chorister, with contempt which was beyond words. Mrs. Purcell looked upon the Captain from another point of view.

"He's a fine handsome man," she said. "He looks like a lord when he comes marching up the aisle, not an old Methusaleh, like most of 'em."

"Ah!" cried Pickering, with a groan, "that's the way the women are led away. He's a fine fellow, he is! oh, yes, he's like a lord, with bills in every shop in the town, and not a penny to pay 'em."

"Them shops!" said Mrs. Purcell. "I don't wonder, if a gentleman's of a yielding disposition. They offer you this, and they offer you that, and won't take an answer. It's their own fault. They didn't ought to put their temptations in folk's way. It's like dodging a bait about a poor fish's nose; and then swearing it

rill make up lovely, and be far more becoming than vhat you've got on. I think it's scandalous, for my part. They deserve to lose their money now and again."

"They say he's going to be married," said old Pick, stolidly.

"Married! You're dreaming, Pick! Lord bless us," said Mrs. Purcell, "that's news, that is! Married? I don't believe a word of it; at his age!"

"You said just now he wasn't a Methusaleh, and no more he is; he's a fine handsome man. He thinks a deal of himself, and that's what makes other folks think a deal of him. The women's as bad as the shops," said old Pick; "they bring it on themselves. Here's a man as is never out of mischief. I've seen him regularly coming home—well—none the better for his liquor; and gamblin' day and night, playing billiards, betting, I don't know what. We all know what that comes to; and a grown-up family besides——"

"Dear!" said Mrs. Purcell, in great concern. She knew a good deal about Miss Despard, and her feelings were very mingled in respect to her. In the first place, to know that her John was in love with *a lady* flattered and excited her, and had made her very curious about Lottie, every detail of whose looks, and appearance generally, she had studied. A Chevalier's daughter might not be any very great thing; but it was a wonderful rise in the world for Mrs. Purcell's

son to be able to permit himself to fall in love with such a person. On the other hand, Miss Despard was poor, and might interfere with John's chance of rising in the world. But anyhow, everything about her was deeply interesting to John's mother. She paused to think what effect such a change would have upon her son before she asked any further questions. What would Miss Despard do? It was not likely she would care for a stepmother after being used to be mistress of the house—would she be ready to accept anyone that asked her, in order to get "a home of her own"? And would John insist upon marrying her? and would he be able to keep a wife? These questions all hurried through Mrs. Purcell's mind on receipt of this startling news. "Dear! dear!" she said—and for a long time it was all she could say. The interests were so mixed that she did not know what to desire. Now or never, perhaps, was the time for John to secure the wife he wanted; but even in that case, would it be right for him to marry? Mrs Purcell did not know what to think. "Did you hear who the lady was?" she asked, in a faint voice.

"Lady?—no lady at all—a girl that works for her living. I know her well enough by sight. One of the dressmaker's girls in the River Lane. Ladies is silly enough, but not so silly as that; though I don't know neither," said old Pick, "what women-folks will *do* for a husband is wonderful. They'll face the

orld for a husband. It don't matter what sort he is, or if he's worth having——"

"They haven't took that trouble for you, anyhow," id Mrs. Purcell faintly, standing up amid her pre-cupations for her own side.

"I've never given 'em the chance," said Pick, with chuckle. "Lord bless you! they've tried a plenty, it I've never given 'em the chance. Many's the ory I could tell you.. They've done their best, poor ings. Some has been that enterprising, I never uld keep in the same room with 'em. But I've p' single, and I'll keep single till my dying day. So ill master, if I can judge. There's some has the ay of it, and some hasn't. It would be a clever ie," said old Pickering, caressing his chin with an tute smile, "to get the better of me."

The housekeeper threw at him a glance of mingled dignation and derision. She gave her head a toss. was not possible for feminine flesh and blood to ear this unmoved. "You're so tempting," she said, ith angry energy. "'Andsome and well to do, and orth a woman's while."

"Bless you, they don't stick at that," said the ld man with a grin. "I could tell you of things s has happened — some to myself — some to other olks——"

"Dear!" cried Mrs. Purcell, "and me to think you ere an old stick of an old bachelor, because nobody

would have you, Pick! There's some, as a body reads it in their face—as dry as an east wind, and cutting like an east wind does, that is never happy but when it's blighting up something. I daresay it's all a story about Captain Despard—just like the rest."

"None of 'em likes it, when you speak free," said old Pick, chuckling to himself. "Some pretends, just to please a man; but women does hang together, whoever says different, and they none of them likes to hear the truth. About Captain Despard, it's a story if you please, but it's true. The girl she makes no secret, she tells everybody as she'll soon make a difference in the house. She'll pack off the son to do for himself, and the daughter——"

"What of the daughter, Pick? Oh, the shameless hussy, to talk like that of a poor motherless young girl——"

"If she wasn't motherless, what would Polly have to do with her? It can't be expected as a second wife should cry her eyes out because the first's gone."

"Polly!" said Mrs. Purcell, with bated breath; "and she says she'll pack the son about his business; and the daughter?—What is she going to do about the daughter, when she's got the poor misfortunate man under her thumb? And who's Polly, that you know so much about her? She's a pretty kind of acquaintance, so far as I can see, for a man as con-

siders himself respectable, and comes out of a gentleman's house."

"That's the other side," said Pick, still chuckling to himself. "I said women hangs together. So they do, till you come to speak of one in particular, and then they fly at her. I don't know nothing against Polly. If the Captain's in love with her, it ain't her fault; if she wants to better herself, it's no more than you or me would do in her place. She's as respectable as most of the folks I know. To work for your living ain't a disgrace."

"It's no disgrace; but a stepmother that is a dressmaking girl will be something new to Miss Despard. Oh, I can't smile! A dressmaker as—— And young, I suppose, like herself? Oh, trust a man for that; she's sure to be young. Poor thing, poor thing! I'm that sorry for her, I can't tell what to do. A lady, Pick; they may be poor, but I've always heard there was no better gentlefolks anywhere to be found. And a woman that the likes of you calls Polly. Oh, that's enough, that's enough for me! A nice, good, respectable girl, that knows what's her due—you don't call *her* Polly. Polly—there's a deal in a name."

"Aha!" said old Pick, rubbing his hands, "I knew as soon as I named one in particular what you would say. Fly at her, that's what all you women do. A name is neither here nor there. I've known as good

women called Polly as was ever christened Mary; eh? ain't they the same name? I had a sister Polly; I had a——"

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Purcell, softly. She was paying no attention to him; her mind was much disturbed. She turned away instinctively from the gathering gloom of evening in which her old companion stood, and cast her anxious eyes upon the wide landscape outside—the sky between grey and blue, the lights beginning to twinkle far down in the steep street. There was something in the great space and opening which seemed to give counsel and support in her perturbation. For she did not know what to do for the best. At such a moment would not John have a better chance than he might ever have? And yet, if he got his heart's desire, was it quite certain that it would be good for John? The Signor's housekeeper was just as anxious about her boy as if she had been a great lady. Twinges of maternal jealousy, no doubt, went through her mind. If John married, he would be separated from his mother, and his wife would look down upon her and teach him to despise her—a mother who was in service. What could she expect if her son married a lady? All these thoughts went through her mind as she looked out with anxiety, which drew deep lines upon her forehead. But, on the whole, she was not selfish, and considered it all anxiously, ready to make any sacrifice

for that which in the long run would be most good for John.

In the meantime old Pickering talked on. When he was set a-going it was difficult to bring him to a stop. He was quite aware that at the present moment he ought not to stay there talking; he knew he ought to be lighting the lamps, and kept listening with expectant ear for a sharp tinkle of the Signor's bell, which should warn him of his retarded duties. But for all that he talked on. Dinner was over for some time, and Pick knew very well that he ought to carry in the notes which he had piled again upon the salver after giving it that polish with his handkerchief. However, though he knew his duty, he took no steps towards performing it, but moved leisurely about, and put various articles back into the old polished cupboard with glass doors, which showed all the best china, and was the pride of Mrs. Purcell's heart. When Maryanne came in, he emptied the salver again and showed her how imperfectly she had cleaned it. "I can't think how folks can be so stupid," Pickering said. "How do you think you are ever to better yourself if you don't take a lesson when it's giv' you? and proud you should be that anyone would take the trouble. If I see it like this again I'll—I don't know what I shan't do." He knew very well that it was what ought to have been his own work that he was thus criticising, and, as it happened, so did Maryanne, whose spirit

was working up to a determination not to be longer put upon. But for all that he found fault, (always waiting to hear the bell ringing sharply, with a quaver of impatience in it,) and she submitted, though she was aware that she was being put upon. Mrs. Purcell, in the window, paid no attention to them. She kept gazing out upon the wide world of grey-blue clouds, and asking herself what would be best for John.

They were disturbed in all these occupations by a step which came briskly downstairs, perhaps betokening, Pickering thought, that the Signor was going out again, and that his own delay about the lamps had been a wise instinct. But, after all, it was not the Signor's step; it was young Purcell, who came along the little winding passage full of corners, and entered the housekeeper's room, scattering the little party assembled there. Maryanne fled as a visitor from the outer world flies from the chamber of a servant of the court, at the advent of the queen. Though she would assure herself sometimes that Mrs. Purcell's son was "no better nor me," yet in his presence Maryanne recognised the difference. He was "the young master" even in Pick's eyes, who stopped talking, and put the notes back once more upon the salver with a great air of business, as if in the act of hastening with them to the Signor. Mrs. Purcell was the only one who received her son with tranquillity. She turned her eyes upon him quietly, with a smile, with a serene pride

which would not have misbecome an empress. No one in the house, not the Signor himself, had ascended to such a height of being as the housekeeper; no one else had produced such a son.

"Go and light the candles in the study, Pick," said young Purcell. "The Signor is in the dark, and he's composing. Quick and carry him the lights. Don't bother him with those letters now. He is doing something beautiful," he said, turning to his mother. "There's a phrase in it I never heard equalled. He has been sitting out on the terrace getting inspiration. I must run back and keep old Pick from disturbing him, making a noise——"

"Stay a moment, Johnny, my own dear——"

"What's the matter, mother? Oh, I know; you've heard of this last offer. But if I take any I'll take St. Ermengilde's, where I could still go on living at home, the Signor says. It's less money, but so long as I can help him and see *her* now and again, and please you——"

"Ah, John, your mother's last; but that's natural," said Mrs. Purcell, shaking her head, "quite natural. I don't complain. Is it another organ you've got the offer of? Well, to be sure! and there are folks that say merit isn't done justice to! John, I've been hearing something," said the housekeeper, putting out her hand to draw him to her; "something as perhaps you ought to know."

The young man looked at her eagerly. In this place he bore a very different aspect from that under

which he had appeared to Lottie. Here it wa
who was master of the situation, the centre of a
many hopes and wishes. He looked at her close
the dusk, which made it hard to see what was in
face. He was a good son, but he was his mot
social superior, and there was a touch of auth
even in the kindness of his voice.

"Something I ought to know? I know it alre
that Mr. Ridsdale has been visiting at the Lo
That is nothing so extraordinary. If you think a
attention from a fashionable fop will outweigh th
votion of years!" said the young man, with a flu
high-flown feeling. He had a great deal of senti
and not very much education, and naturally he
high-flown. "People may say what they like," he
on in an agitated voice, "but merit does carry the
They've offered me St. Ermengilde over the heac
half-a-dozen. Is it possible, can you suppose, that
should be so blind!"

"That wasn't it," said Mrs. Purcell quietly;
something quite different, my dear. Shut the c
that we mayn't have old Pick coming in again (it
he that told me), and you shall hear."

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHE

# WITHIN THE PRECINCTS

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD," ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1879.

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# WITHIN THE PRECINCTS.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MUSICIAN AT HOME.

THE Signor's house was one of those which, when general peacefulness had made the battlements round St. Michael's unnecessary, had grown within the outer wall. It was more like a growth than a building. Windows which looked, as we have said, as if cut in the side of a precipice, gave light to the small panelled chambers which were connected by bits of quaint passages, here and there by a little flight of stairs, with tiny vestibules and landing-places, wasting the little space there was. Room after room had no doubt been added as necessity arose, and each new room had to be connected somehow with the others. The house occupied more space than a comfortable ugly modern house with tolerably sized rooms would have done, and when the Signor came into possession it had been a miracle of picturesque awkwardness, not a room in it capable of holding more than three or four people at a time, yet as many rooms as would have

lodged a dozen—the least possible use for the greatest possible expenditure of space. The Signor, however, had built on the inner side a dining-room in red brick, which made existence possible, though it failed in the point of beauty. To tell the truth, the musician's dining-room was an eyesore to all the antiquaries and all the critics. Nobody knew by what neglect of the architect, by what partiality of the Board of Works, it had been permitted to be built. It was of no style at all, neither Gothic, like the original building, nor Queen Anne, like the fashion. He had failed in his duty in every respect. It was a square box with a large window filling up one side. It was lighted with gas. It had red curtains in bold and uncompromising rep, and a large mahogany sideboard of the worst period. How he had been allowed to build this monstrosity nobody knew. It had been made the subject of a painful discussion in the Chapter itself, where Canon Skeffington (the Honble. and Revd.) complained so bitterly of the injury done to his best principles and highest feelings, that the Dean was irritated, and took up the cudgels on his side on behalf of his favourite musician. "He has a right, I suppose, to make himself comfortable like the rest of us," the head of the community said. "No right to make my life a burden to me," said the Honourable Canon; and, he added, almost weeping, "I cannot look out of my window *without* seeing the thing. You talk at your ease, you

others——" But what was to be done? The Chapter could not take so bold a step as to invade the rights of private property, tear down the Signor's red curtains, burn his sideboard, destroy his walls. He had to be left to the enjoyment of his villanous erection. The Signor laughed in his sleeve, but in public was remorseful, bemoaning his own ignorance of art, and declaring that if he could afford it, rather than give pain to Canon Skeffington—but then he could not afford it—and what was to be done? He kept his dining-room, which was big enough to accommodate his friends, but for himself the Signor had better taste than he professed to have. His favourite sitting-room was in the same position and had the same view as that of his housekeeper, but its window was between two buttresses of the wall, which held in their gigantic arms a little square shelf of green turf, a small projection of the hill, which above and below was covered with masonry, leaving this little ledge of grass, like one of the hanging gardens of Scripture, hung high in the air above the town and the landscape. The Signor's window opened upon this little terrace. His room within was low and dark, but in summer at least this mattered little, for its dim light and shadowy walls made a pleasant shelter, like a bower in a wood, from the lightness and brightness outside. There was a heavy beam across the roof, from which hung a little chandelier of old Venice glass, reflected in a tall old mirror

among the oak panels over the mantelpiece, and not much more bright than they were. On one side were the carved doors of a cupboard in the wall, which was full of old music, the Signor's chief treasures, and on the other was a range of low bookshelves, also filled with music books of every size and kind. The piano stood in the corner near the window, with the keyboard close to the light. There were a few chairs about the room, and a writing-table piled with papers. This was all the furniture of the dim little chamber, and it was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than existed between it and the new building which had so shocked Canon Skeffington. And the Signor was not in this particular much unlike his house. A touch of sentiment, which some people were disposed to call high-flown, mingled in him with a curious undercurrent of cynicism, which few people suspected at all. He liked to jar upon the Canon Skeffingtons of existence and ruffle their tempers and their finest feelings. But in his heart he had feelings equally fine, and was as easily *froissé* as they. He mocked at them on the very points in which he himself was weak, affecting an insensibility which he did not feel, building the vile modern room with profound enjoyment of their delicate distress, but retiring out of it himself to the shelter of this dim romantic chamber. The combination was very like the Signor.

*On* this particular evening, when young Purcell

vent to call for lights, the Signor was seated out on his little terrace enjoying the twilight and a cigarette together. There were two chairs on the scrap of grass, and a little table with an inkstand upon it, and the cup in which the Signor had taken his black coffee after dinner. He was leaning back in his chair puffing out the fragrant smoke from his cigarette, lazily watching it as it floated upwards, and now and then noting down a bar or two of music upon a piece of paper in his hand. Sometimes he took the cigarette from his mouth and hummed a scrap of an air, keeping time with his head and hand. There was no one who was more popular in the country as a composer of graceful drawing-room songs than Signor Rossinetti. It was something refined, something elegant that was expected from him, delicate soprano melodies, fine combinations for tenors and altos. It was very seldom that he took any trouble about the bass, but his tenor songs were justly considered exquisite. He liked to have a pretty set of verses on hand, and "set" them in the intervals of more serious business. The summer evening, when he sat out after dinner upon his scrap of terrace, was the time when he had most inspiration. His pupil and *protégé*, young Purcell, thought there was no intellectual pleasure higher and more elevating, than to sit out here in the shadow of the great grey buttresses, with the cheerful distant noises of the High Street floating upward from the foot of the wall, and to watch the

Signor composing his song. The young fellow would run in to the piano and "try over" every line of the symphony as it came welling out from that fount of music. He said often that, except one thing, there was no such delight in the world. To see genius working under his very eyes, what a privilege it was! To Purcell it seemed that his master read his heart, and uttered his deepest sentiments for him in those compositions. To-night his mind had been lulled out of great commotion and disturbance by the rosy vision of love and happiness that had breathed through the notes. It was glad, it was sad, it was full of suggestion, it wrung the very heart of Purcell—"'Twas in the time of roses, they plucked them as they passed." Would that time ever come for him? He thought the Signor had read the depths of his heart, the wistful longing which was sometimes hope and sometimes despair, the pictures he made to himself of one day wandering by *her* side, one day gathering roses for her. He murmured over and over the tune of the refrain in a kind of ecstasy as he went to his mother's room, his fancy excited, his head all on fire, half with the delicious sense of being friend to such a genius, and sharing, as it were, the very inspiration that produced such beautiful things—and half with the pride and delight of being so deeply in love and hanging on so exquisite an edge of anguish. The Signor himself did not know *how* much those pretty compositions of his went to his

pupil's heart; but he was flattered—as who would not be?—by this never-failing appreciation of his work, and youthful enthusiasm. It pleased him vaguely, just as the floating sounds from below, the voices and noises, all softened by the warm air of the summer evening, and even by the dimness of the twilight, pleased him. How harmonious they became as they soared upwards, all that was harsh taken out of them, filling the solitude with a genial sense of human fellowship! Perhaps the Signor was, like many others, not too fond of his fellow-creatures close at hand; but as they went and came, far down at his feet, talking, calling to each other, shouting their wares, singing now and then, making a sound of their steps upon the pavement, and a movement of their breathing in the air, he was transported with the hum, and felt that he loved them. This always gave him inspiration, this and the glimmer of the river and of the distant villages scattered over the plain, throwing up here and there a dim point of a spire among the trees. When Purcell left him, he put aside the bit of music-paper on which he had been jotting down his chords. He raised his eyes to the profound unfathomable blue above, and swung back upon his chair. He was half giddy with the sense of circling depths of infinity above him, though himself raised so high. The Signor was not without a feeling that he was raised very high, not only in locality, but in soul; yet there was a heaven above which made

his head giddy when he looked up—a heaven full of stars, from Palestrina to Mendelssohn, all shining over him, serene, unapproachable, not even holding out any encouragement to him, passive and splendid as the other stars which hid themselves in that still-luminous blue. Would any one ever look up at that sky and recall his name as also among the ranks of the unapproachable? The Signor turned his eyes from it with a sigh as he heard some one enter the room, and came down to earth, letting his chair drop upon its four legs, and his mind return to the present. He watched through the open window the advent of old Pickering carrying the lamp. The old man put it down on the table, and lighted some candles on the mantelpiece in front of the dim mirror, which gave them back with a blurred, enlarged reflection. His master sat outside and watched him pottering about the room, setting the chairs against the wall, and vainly attempting to make everything "straight." It was a standing grievance to old Pick that he was not allowed to close the window and draw the curtains as it was right to do. The Signor outside sat and watched him with a gentle amusement. He liked to feel the oddness and superiority of his own tastes, thrown into evidence by the mighty anxiety of old Pick to shut the window. A smile came over his face. To ordinary mortals, in ordinary houses, it was not necessary to seek inspiration from the skies and the wide world of evening air.

As Pick approached the window, with his usual look of wistful anxiety to be allowed to do what was right, and tacit disapproval of lawless habits, the Signor stepped through, smiling. "I think you will shut me out one night, Pick," he said, "and then you will have my blood on your soul—for what could I do upon the terrace? I should fall asleep and tumble over, and be picked up in little pieces at the foot of the hill."

"Ah! I don't feel no fear of that, sir," said Pickering, shaking his head; "you've got too good a voice for that, sir. I don't make no doubt that you could hold an A sharp till you frighted the whole Abbey. And besides I always looks out; I've got the habit in this house. Even the girl, she'll go and stand at the window, as if the view was any matter to her; it's a thing as carries one away. But I don't hold with leaving all open when the lights are lighted. Bless you, the top windows in the street with a spyglass, or even with good eyes like what I had when I was young, they could see in."

"Much good it would do them," said the Signor, sitting down before his piano. And indeed it is quite true that as he sat close to the window, relieved against the light of the lamp within, there were eyes at the top windows opposite which could catch with difficulty the outline of the Signor's pale profile and black moustache. Some of the young ladies in the shops would climb up occasionally and show that exciting prospect

to a friend. But it was an amusement which pa after the first moment, and certainly did no harr the Signor.

"Maybe not much good, sir," said old Pick, always would have the last word; "but it might harm. You never can tell what folks will say. less they know the more they'll talk; and that's all the world over; though I will say for the Abbe it's as bad or worse than most other places."

"Why should it be worse, Pick?"

"I don't know, sir—unless it's the clergy and chevaliers. You see, when gentlemen has little nothing to do, they're brought down to the level of women, so far as that goes—and as gentlemen alv does things more thorough than the women w they're once started, the consequence nat'rally i Leastways that's my notion of it," said Pick;—' women haven't the strength to start a real talkin does harm. They tries hard—as hard as they kr how—but bless you, in that as in most things, wants a man to show 'em the way."

"That is a new view, Pick. I thought if there one thing in which the ladies had the advantage us——"

"There ain't one thing, sir, not one. For my I I can tell in a minute a story as will hang togethe real crusher, one as will drive folks distracted and a family. You'll never get that out of a wom

tongue. Nay, nay, they hasn't the force for it; they're poor creatures at the best; they can make a person uncomfortable, but they can't do no more. And when I say the Abbey's as bad or maybe worse, I mean that the gentlemen has little to do, and they has to amuse themselves the same as the women. That's what I mean to say."

The Signor gave a half attention to Pick's long speech while he sat at his piano. All the time he was running over his new composition with one hand, correcting a note here and there, changing a harmony. "'Twas in the time of roses—the time of roses," he hummed softly under his breath. But the smile on his lip was for Pick, and he gave him a negligent half attention, amused by his chatter, and by the peculiar views he held forth. He looked up at him as Pick stopped, singing with a little flourish in the accompaniment, which meant satisfaction in having at last got the phrase to his mind—"'Twas in the time of roses —the time of roses——" Old Pick was not surprised by the utterance of a sentiment so foreign to his subject. He knew his master's ways, and he took a certain interest in his master's productions, such as old servants often benevolently accord to the doings of their "family." He could not tell what folks saw in them—still, as the Signor's productions, he looked upon them with kindly toleration all the same.

"You may say, sir," he cried, "'the time o' roses'.

—that's just the very thing; for, I daresay, but for that rose in his button-hole, and the jaunty looks of him, a young girl wouldn't have seen nothing in him. But I don't know neither—women is the queerest things on the face of this whole earth. Flatter them, or make them think they're bettering themselves, and there's nothing they won't do."

"Who is it that wears flowers in his button-hole?" said the Signor. He wore them himself, and he was curious and slightly excited, wondering if any gossip could by any chance have got up about himself. The idea of such a thing kindled him into interest; his right hand dropped off from the piano, though with the other hand he kept softly sounding notes in the bass, and he turned towards his old servant with a look of animation altogether new. What interest is there like that with which one anticipates hearing something about oneself?

But at this moment Purcell's steps were heard coming quickly along the passage, and he came in with his head erect, and his eyes gleaming, and pushed old Pick out of his way. "That will do, Pick," he said, with a glimmer of impatience, "that will do! I will set things right for the master, myself."

"What is the matter, boy?"

"Matter or no matter, if you think I'll leave it to the first that comes to look after my master—" said old Pick, standing his ground. He would not yield;

he was very friendly in general to Mr. John, and ready to do what he ordered, but there are limits to everything. He stood his ground steadily, arranging and re-arranging the papers on the table, while young Purcell went forward to the Signor. The young fellow put himself behind the musician, between him and the window, and stooped to whisper in his ear. His glowing eyes, his eager aspect, made a great impression on the Signor, who was very impressionable. He was possessed by some new thought. "Master," he said, breathless, "I have a hundred things to say to you. I have heard something new. I want your advice, I want your help." He was breathless, as if he had been running a race, though all he had really done had been to come along a few yards of passage. The Signor was easily moved by the sight of emotion, and he was fond of his *protégé*. "Go, Pick," he said immediately, "and bring us some tea."

"Tea, sir!" said the old man in consternation. "You never takes it. If it's nothing but to get rid of Pick, I'll go. I'll go; never fear but I'll go."

"I want some tea," said the Signor authoritatively; "foolish old man, would you spoil my new song for want of a cup of tea? Go to Mrs. Purcell, and tell her, with my compliments, I want some of her special brew the very best, as she used to make it for me when I had headaches. Quick, my head threatens to ache Well! what is it, boy? Has the Queen sent for

you to be the head of her orchestra, or is the Dean coming to pay us a visit? It must be something very important to judge by your face."

"Oh, sir," cried young Purcell, "what a heart you have! making up a headache and a whole story to save old Pick's feelings—and me that am really no better than he is, pushing him out of the way!"

"Nobody is any better than any other," said the Signor in his measured tones. "I have tried to teach you so all your life. But I will allow that some are worse than others," he added, with a smile. His disciple was too much occupied, however, with the urgency of his own case to notice what he said.

"Master," said the young man, "I have hurried back to tell you I have changed my mind; I will take the organ at Sturminster after all."

An almost imperceptible change came over the Signor's face—that slight stiffening of the muscles of the mouth—continuance of the easy and genial smile of real satisfaction into the forced and uncomfortable one of pretended equanimity—which is the sign above all others of disappointment and displeasure, became visible in his face. "Well——" he said slowly; "why not—if you think it will be more to your advantage. After all, that is the grand test."

"*It* is not that," said young Purcell, shrinking *little;* "you can't think that I would leave you only

my advantage. No, master, it is not that. You must hear it all before you judge."

"Certainly," said the Signor. He kept the same smile rigid upon his face. "And in the meantime here is old Pick with the tea," he added, "and we must drink it for the sake of his feelings. What, Pick, is it made already? I don't think your mother can be so careful as usual, boy, about her brew."

"I don't put no faith in tea that stands long to draw, sir," said Pick. "I like it myself with all the scent in it. Water as boils hard, and not a minute lost. That's my maxim. It's fresh made with plenty of tea in, and I'll warrant it good. Smell that," he said, taking off the lid of the teapot. The Signor listened to him quietly, taking no notice of Purcell's impatience. He smiled on the old man and let him talk. He was wounded and offended by his pupil's sudden change after the decision of an hour ago; and though he had a great desire to hear what reason could be given for this difference of feeling, his annoyance and disgust at the change found expression in this apparent carelessness of it. He kept Pick talking with secret malice, while Purcell fretted. The young fellow did not know how to contain himself. He collected the music-books that were on the piano, and put them back on the shelves. Then he took them down again; he shifted the candles; he roamed from corner to corner, moving the chairs about, throwing

into disorder the things on the table; now and then he cast a piteous look at his master; but the Signor sat, in serene malice sounding the bass notes in his accompaniment, putting artful questions to old Pickering, and leading him on to talk. It was the old man himself at length who brought the suspense to an end by recollecting something it was necessary for him to do. "They'd have kep' me there all night," he said to Mrs. Purcell, with pretended impatience, as he got back to the housekeepers's room. "Dear!" said Mrs. Purcell, astonished; she could not understand how the Signor could waste time talking to old Pick at a moment so momentous for her John.

When old Pickering was gone, the Signor still said nothing. He turned to the piano and began to play; he was like a woman offended, who will not approach the subject on which she is dying to be informed. At last Purcell, approaching humbly with wistful eyes, ventured to put one hand lightly upon his arm.

"Master," said the young man, "let me speak to you. I cannot do anything till I have spoken to you."

"To me, boy? Speak then, as much as you please," said the Signor, nodding at him with an air of ingenuous wonder while he rang out the end of the melody. "'Twas in the time of roses," he sang; then swinging himself round on his stool, "You want to speak to me? Why didn't you say so sooner? Speak *then,* I am all attention," he said.

Then Purcell began, once more breathless with agitation and excitement: "I think there seems a chance for me, sir," he said; "my mother has just been telling me. It is such a chance as never may happen again. You know I love St. Michael's better than anything in the world—except one thing. Master, *she* is in trouble; her home is about to be made impossible to her; now or never; if I had a home to offer her, she might accept it. This is why I said I would take Sturminster. St. Ermengilde is more to my mind, a thousand times more to my mind; and to be near you, to have the benefit of your advice, that would be everything for me. But, dear master," said the young man, "must I not think of her first? and here is a chance for me, perhaps the only chance I may have in my life."

"Has anything happened to Miss Despard?" said the Signor in great surprise. He recognised the justice of the plea, and he listened with great interest and sympathy, and a curious feeling which was neither sympathy nor interest. Lottie was to the Signor a mysterious creature, exciting an altogether different kind of feeling from that which he felt for his pupil. He was almost sentimentally attached to his pupil, and entered into the history and prospects of his love with an enthusiasm quite unlike that with which a mature Englishman generally interests himself in anybody's love-affairs. But along with this sentiment there existed another almost directly opposite to it, an

interest in Lottie as a being of a totally differen
from Purcell, of whom it would be profoundly c
to know the history, and the means by whic
might perhaps be brought to look favourably on
to marry—Purcell; which seemed to the Signor
"on the cards." How she might be brought t
in what way she would reconcile herself to be Pu
wife; how she would bow a spirit, evidently so
to the young musician's origin and to his ways o
ing, which, though refined enough, were still
bottom those of a man whose mother was "in ser
all this was captivating as a matter of study
Signor; he got, or expected to get, a great d
amusement out of it, expecting that Lottie's str
in fitting herself for the position would be won
enough: so that his interest cannot be called e
benevolent. But between this keen and half-r
interest and the sentimental interest he took in Pu
"happiness," it may be imagined that the crisi
nearly as exciting to him as it was to Purcell hi
He listened to the story with the warmest interes
agreed that there was nothing for it but to
Sturminster. "But you must not lose a day," he
"you must secure the lady at once, there is
moment to lose."

"Secure?" Purcell said, growing red and gr
white; "then you think there is a hope, a—
*hood*——"

"Think? I think there is an almost certainty! cried the Signor. He became quite excited himself for the sake of his pupil and for his own sake, for the keen intellectual interest he felt in this curious problem as to what Lottie would do. "You must go to-morrow," he cried, with all the eagerness of a personal interest; "you must not lose a single day."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### YOUNG PURCELL.

NEXT morning found young Purcell in a state of excitement and nervous agitation still greater than that of the previous night. He had not slept during the natural time for sleep, and in consequence, according to the fashion of youth unaccustomed to watching, had fallen very fast and heavily asleep, out of sheer fatigue in the morning, waking only with an indescribable sense of guilt to hear the bells ringing for the morning service in the Abbey. Such a thing had never happened to him before, and his shame and sense of wrong-doing were more than reason. He jumped up in dismay, but even the most hurried toilet could not get him in time; and his mother appeared at his door as he prepared to rush out half-dressed, preventing his exit. "You wouldn't go out without your breakfast?" she cried with horror. The virtuous and carefully regulated life of the chorister and musical student trained under the Signor's eye and his mother's constant care, had made a late morning and an omitted breakfast seem like something criminal. Besides, a *sense* of the crisis had got into the air. The Signor

had left an anxious message, begging his *protégé* not to hurry himself, to take his time, and to keep up his courage. His mother kissed him wistfully, and served him with a noble breakfast, as if he wanted strengthening in the most material way, for the important piece of work before him. Even old Pick looked at him with respectful curiosity as at a man on the edge of a very serious step indeed, a curiosity mingled with awe and a little grim humour and admiration. The boy was going to do what Pick had never had the courage to do; and though the old man thought the young one a fool, and hugged himself on his superior wisdom, yet it cannot be denied that he looked with a certain respect on the bold youth who was about to make such a venture. He put his breakfast on the table, not grudging the trouble, though the Signor's breakfast had long been over, and he shook his head behind Mr. John's chair. "Take a good breakfast, it will do you a deal of good," he said, as he left the hero of the occasion. Purcell, though his mother was only the housekeeper, was the son of the house; he took his meals with the master, though it was his mother who prepared their dishes in the kitchen. It was a false position, perhaps, but he had not yet found any trouble in it. He had been a little curly-headed boy in the choir when Mrs. Purcell came first to take charge of the Signor's house; she had been the sole servant then, and had scrubbed and brushed and cooked,

diligently keeping everything in order. Old
had gone through the same sort of training w
made John Purcell a gentleman. He, too, l
a chorister, and had progressed into a lay-cl
possibilities of rising to something better.
was one of the unsuccessful ones; his voice fa
his science never had been great, and a li
Mrs. Purcell's advent he had come to the Si
to be provided for. The organist had a la
and a somewhat indolent temper; the easies
provide for the old singing-man was to take
his own household, and this was what had be
As for Pick, he had settled very easily into
place, having been the son of the master o
tavern; and though it cost him an effort to
ledge the little soprano, whose surplice he ha
so often, in the light of a young master, yet
was made. Pick was conscientious, he did
anything by halves; and the first time that the
pupil was permitted to play the voluntary in
bey, the old man made his fellow-servants ju
gave the youth a shock of mingled alarm a
sure, by suddenly addressing him as Mr. Jo
body had expected such an heroic act of su
but Pick knew his place and all that was su
the circumstances. "Him as the Signor pu
own place has a right to be respected," he s
he never wavered in that noble self-abnegati

any one suppose that it was painful to him. All this had happened long before the period of which we are writing; but what sensation, what emotion, it had caused at the time! Pick stood now, pausing behind the young musician's chair, and lifted up his hands and shook his head. To think this boy, whom he had, so to speak, brought up, should show so much courage! Pick himself had never made such a venture, nor even the Signor, who was the master of both; and yet this boy was going to do it. The old man shook his head, not knowing what might come of it; but in his heart he felt a respect reaching to admiration, for the courage which was so much beyond anything he had ever known.

Courage, however, was the last quality in which, on this particular morning, young Purcell could be said to excel. To devote your life in secret to a beloved object; to dream of her night and day; to make impassioned resolutions, and determine to win glory and wealth for her, is not so hard for a fanciful youth; but to go into her presence, look into the face that dazzles you—confront the goddess of your distant worship, and without any preliminaries to lead up to this great step, and prepare her for it, quite off-hand and impromptu ask her to marry you! This is a very different matter. The young man sat alone and tried to eat his breakfast, trembling to think of what was before him. The circumstances were such as to add

tenfold to the natural tremors of such a crisis. She was a lady, and far above him—not rich indeed, nor occupying any very exalted position in reality—but her dignity was very imposing to the young man, who had always recognised this grace of what seemed to him rank, as one of her particular charms. Purcell was painfully aware that he himself had no right to the name of gentleman. Many a less worthy claimant has borne it, with no thought that it was inappropriate, and Purcell had anxiously and painfully endeavoured to acquire all its outside appearances. He knew, as well as any, how to behave himself in society, and passed muster very well among other young men. He was a little over-anxious, perhaps, a little too fine in his language, too deferential and polite, not sufficiently at his ease, to get much enjoyment out of his social experiences; but this was a fault on the right side. Notwithstanding his modest sense of his own "merits," Purcell could not persuade himself that he was Lottie's equal. He knew he was not her equal. She had been as a star to him, far away and out of reach—and though in the fervour of imaginative passion the hope of winning her had seemed like heaven, yet the actual enterprise of wooing her, when brought thus close, seemed very appalling indeed—a quest more dangerous and alarming than ever knight errant set *forth* upon. His knees knocked together, great beads *of moisture* came upon his forehead—how was he

do it? how was he to present himself, to explain the hopes which, looked at thus in cold blood, appeared even to himself impossible, not to say presumptuous in the highest degree? How was he ever, he asked himself, to make her aware what he meant? She would not understand him. She would think he meant something else, anything else—rather than that he, a poor musician, the son of the Signor's house-keeper, wanted to MARRY her, the daughter of a gentleman. It would be impossible to make her understand him. This seemed the first difficulty of all, and it was an appalling one. She would not even know what he meant. In this respect indeed Purcell was mistaken, for Lottie already knew well enough what were the hopes in his heart—resenting them highly as one of the wrongs of fate against her; but this he had no way of knowing. If he could but have got anyone to smooth the way for him, to tell what it was he wanted to say, to set him a-going, he thought he could find eloquence enough to carry him on—but how could he make that *premier pas*? Thus, while the household was all expectant, excited by what was coming, Purcell sat over his breakfast and trembled, too frightened to move or think, though with a consciousness that this desperate step must be taken. The Signor in the Abbey, rolling forth melodious thunders out of the organ, sat thinking *of him with* a smile, and a half sigh. *Pick, he had a certain* admiration for the valour

of the boy thus pushing forward before himself into the mysteries of life; but the Signor's thoughts were more tender and less cynical than those of his servant. He could not help wondering how it was that in his own person he had let all such chances slip. How was it? As he followed his pupil in imagination to the feet of his love, that young creature seemed very fair, very much to be desired. No doubt, to have such a one by your side, sharing your life with you, would make existence bear a very different appearance. Why was it he had never done what Purcell was going to do? This question seemed to flow into the music he was playing, and to go circling round and round the Abbey in the morning sunshine. Why? Life was endurable enough, a calm sort of routine, with now and then a pleasurable sensation in it, but nothing more; and no doubt it might have been made more of. The Signor could not answer his own question. He did not want to make himself the rival of his pupil, or to do anything similar to what young Purcell was doing. He had no wish to make any violent change in life, which was well enough as it was. But only it was odd that a simple fellow like John Purcell should thus boldly have pushed before him into a completer existence—very odd; the boy was bold. Whether he succeeded or not, his very agitation and ardour had *in them* a higher touch of emotion than any that had *been in* the life of his master. He laughed within

himself at the boy's temerity—but the laugh was mingled with a sigh.

And Mrs. Purcell, for her part, was in high excitement, longing for her boy to be gone on his errand, longing for him to be back again. That her John should marry a lady was the climax of grandeur and happiness. To be sure, it ought to have been a rich lady or great lady. He deserved a princess, his mother felt. Still, as things were, it was a kind of intoxication to think even of the daughter of a Chevalier. Why did he linger, as if breakfast was worth thinking of? She listened for every sound, for the door shutting, for his step in the hall, and was very cross when Maryanne made a noise, so that she could not hear what was going on upstairs. As for old Pick, he brushed Mr. John's hat with a grim smile on his face, and hung about the hall to watch him go out.

"The young un's off at last," he said with a chuckle, marching into the kitchen: when just before the end of the service in the Abbey, when all the air about us ringing with the echo of the Amens, Purcell at t screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and went , to meet his fate.

Poor young fellow, he could not have been more med had he gone to face a lion instead of a lady. lion *would have been* nothing. He would have out *for succour*, and used whatever weapons he

could lay hold of; but nobody could help him with Lottie—no shield would cover him from the lightnings of her eyes. It was all embarrassing, all terrible; even if by any chance things should turn out in his favour, he did not know what he should do. What could he call her? Not Lottie, that was too familiar. Not Miss Despard. All these different and disjointed thoughts seemed to float about his head in the maze of excitement he was in—he was past thinking, but such questions kept floating in and out of his mind. It was the most extraordinary relief when, going to the door of Captain Despard's house, he found that Lottie was out. If she had been there, it seemed to Purcell that he would have run away—but she was not there. He asked when she was expected back and went on, recovering his breath. He could not go home again, where presently the Signor would come from the Abbey and question him. The service, however, was not so nearly over as he thought. It was a saint's day, and there was a sermon. The precincts were very still and deserted, for most people were at church. Mrs O'Shaughnessy, sitting at her window, saw the young musician walk across the broad silent sunshine, but he did not see her. He went up the Dean's walk, hearing his own step echo through the silence, and past the Deanery, and out upon the slopes beyond. It was shady and sweet under the trees, which rose up close against the old wall—and all was very quiet

during the time of matins, though the town went on with its usual hum down below at the foot of the hill. Purcell began to recover himself a little and take breath as he came to this shelter and refuge. Many a time had he strayed under these trees, thinking of *her*, wondering if he ever might be able to approach her. It was strange to be here, however, in the morning, the hour of work and engagements, which he never had to himself, and to hear the far-off sound of the organ pealing out after the sermon was over. All the common occupations of life seemed to be suspended for Purcell. He felt as ordinary men feel on an occasional stolen Sunday, when work is suspended, and the duty of church-going put aside. All was so sweet, and serene, and still—no one to disturb his thoughts: the sound of the organ in the distance keeping him aware of the fact that he was singularly, unprecedentedly liberated from his usual occupations: and the tremor of agitation dying away into an excitement which was more bearable, which left room for all the sweeter musings, of which *she* was the centre. He sat down on the root of a tree, and let himself breathe. Then came the first notes of the voluntary, and a distant hum as of the congregation dispersing. Few people were likely to come here at this hour in the morning, but still Purcell felt that he had but a moment *in which to indulge* himself, and that soon he *must turn back.*

As he sat thus trying to collect himself, a sudden sound close by, the rustle of a dress among the bushes, the soft sound of a footstep caught his ear. He looked up—and his heart jumped into his throat. There She stood before him, a little basket in her hand. There was a by-way into the town by the slopes, and Lottie had been about her marketing. She was in her usual simple morning frock, clean print and nothing more, and though her head was sufficiently full of dreams and her mind of anxieties, she was at present lingering upon neither, but going straight from one place to another, as became the active morning hour and the consciousness of various things to do. When she saw Purcell spring to his feet suddenly in the midst of the path, for the moment Lottie was startled. She made him a little gracious but indifferent sign of recognition, as courtesy required—for ridiculous as were the notions in his head, she could not be rude to him—and was passing on, not wanting any further parley, when she was struck by the agitation in his face. He was staring at her as if she had been a ghost—his mouth was open, his breath coming quick, his colour changing. Excitement did not improve his appearance. She had almost laughed, then checked herself remorsefully, and became so much the more sympathetic for her temporary movement of mirth.

"Is there anything the matter?" she said kindly. "I am afraid you are ill. Has anything—gone wrong?"

She did not know what to say, he looked at her with such solemn eyes.

"Oh, nothing—nothing has gone wrong. I am not ill. Miss Despard—I did not expect to see you here."

"No—but I hope it is not I who have frightened you," said Lottie. "I sometimes go to the Bridge road this way."

"You have not frightened me," said Purcell, who found it easier to repeat her words than to say anything original; "but I—did not know you went this way."

It was all that Lottie could do, once more, to keep herself from laughing. She gave him a little nod, and was about to pass, saying, "What a lovely morning it is!" the stereotyped English remark; when he made a hurried step after her, and, holding up his hands, entreated her, in a piteous voice, to stay a moment. "Miss Despard—what startled me was that I was looking for you. Oh, stay a moment, and let me speak to you!" he said.

Lottie stood still, arrested in her progress, throwing a wondering look upon him. What could he want with her? Her first glance was simple surprise—her second—Was it possible he could mean *that?*—could he be bold enough, rash enough? Next moment she blushed *for her own folly.* To be afraid of young *Purcell! That was foolishness* indeed. She stood

still there, one foot put out to go on, her basket in her hand.

"Please say what it is, Mr. Purcell. I have got something to do. I ought to be at home."

The morning is not the moment for a love tale. How much more congenial would have been the evening, the twilight, the subdued poetic hour, after the sun had disappeared, that great busybody who shows every imperfection, and is himself so perpetually moving on! Something to do was in every line of Lottie's energetic figure. She had no time for lingering, nor wish to linger. "Please say what it is." Only business should be treated in this summary way, not love.

"Miss Despard," said the young musician, whose limbs were trembling under him, "I wanted to say a great deal to you; it is very important — for me. Things are going well with me," he added, with desperation, after a momentary pause. "I have been appointed to a church—a fine church—with a good instrument. They are to give me a good salary, and they say I can have as much teaching as I like. I shall be very well off."

"I am glad to hear you are so fortunate," said Lottie. Her eyes were full of surprise, and for a moment there was a gleam of amusement in them. That he should waylay her to tell her this, seemed a curious piece of ostentation or folly. "I am very glad," she

peated; "but you must forgive me if I have to asten home, for I have a great many things to do."

"One moment," he said, putting out his hand to op her. "That was not all. The Signor thinks— ou know the Signor, Miss Despard, there is not a etter musician in the country—he thinks I will make rogress. He thinks I may rise—as high as any one an rise in our profession. He tells me I may be a ch man yet before I die."

"Indeed, I hope all he says will come true," said ottie; "but why you should take the trouble to tell e——"

Then suddenly she caught his eye, and stopped ort, and blushed an angry red. She saw what was ming in a moment, which did not, however, prevent r from drawing herself up with a great deal of dig- ty, and adding, "I don't know what you mean."

"Miss Despard," he said with a gasp, "there is no mparison between me and you. But you are not so ell off—not happy. They say—you know how people ill talk—that there is something going to happen that ill make you very uncomfortable."

"Stop!" she said, with an involuntary cry, half of nger, half of amazement. Then she laughed. "Do ou want me to acknowledge that you are much better ff than I am?" she said; "but there is no need to com- are you with me."

"It could not be done, Miss Lottie. I know it

ıuld not be done. You are a lady, and far above ıe. I know I am not your equal—in some things."

Lottie began to be too angry to laugh, but yet she was provoked to ridicule, which is the keenest of weapons. She made him a little mocking curtsey. "It is very kind of you to say so, I am sure, for we are quite poor people, Mr. Purcell; not fortunate, and getting on in the world like you."

"No, Miss Despard," he said, simply, "that was just what I wanted to say. If you had been as well off as I could wish, I should not have ventured to say anything. I have always loved you, and thought of you above all the world. Since you first came to St. Michael's, I have never thought of any one but you. It has been my hope that some time or other I might be able to — but it was only just yesterday that I heard something that made me settle — two things——"

She did not speak, being, indeed, too angry and annoyed for speech; but she felt a kind of contemptuous, wrathful interest in what he was saying, and curiosity to know what it was that had induced him to make this venture; and, accordingly, gave him a glance, in which there was an impatient question. Purcell was not too discriminating. He felt encouraged by being listened to, from whatsoever motive.

"*Two* things," he said, with stolid steadiness. "*One*, to take Sturminster. I had settled before

ould not take it, but St. Ermengilde's. But when I eard *that*, I changed my mind, though it did not lease the Signor. Sturminster will make me indeendent; it will give me a home. And then I settled ) tell you, Miss Lottie: if you are uncomfortable at ome, if you don't like things that may be going to appen: to tell you that there's another home ready ır you, if you will have it; a home that may be ıade very comfortable; a place of your own, to do hat you like with, that will be waiting for you, whenver you please, at a moment's notice, the sooner the etter. If you would say yes, I would go directly, I ould go to-morrow, and prepare; and nobody would e able to give you trouble or make you uncomforıble any longer. Only say the word, and there is othing, nothing I would not do——"

Lottie stood and gazed at him, wondering, bitterly shamed and humiliated, and yet not without a sense ıat so much simple devotion was worth more than to e crushed, or scorned, or flung from her, as she ished to fling it. She restrained herself with an effort. What do you mean?" she said. "Is it possible that ou are asking me to *marry* you, Mr. Purcell? That annot be what you mean."

"What else could it be?" he said, turning on her look of genuine surprise. "You don't suppose, Miss Despard, *that I could* be thinking of anything 'se?"

His cheeks grew crimson, and so did hers. A s of anger and shame and confusion came from l breast. She stamped her foot impatiently on the grou "You would never, never have ventured to ask n never, if I had not been helpless and friendless a poor!"

"No," he said again, with a simplicity in whi she could not help feeling a certain nobleness. would not have ventured, for I am not what you c a gentleman; but when I heard you were in troul I could not keep silent. I thought to myself, M Lottie shall not be unhappy because of having no ho to go to——"

"Oh!" said Lottie, putting out her hand to st him. She could not bear any more. Her heart w sick with the mortification of such a suit. She cou have crushed and trampled upon her humble lover, rage and shame, and yet she could not but see t generosity and truth in his heart. If he had been l worthy, it would have been less hard upon her. ' is not a thing that can be," she cried hastily. "C don't say another word. I know you are kind, but is not a thing that can be."

"Not now?" he said, looking at her wistfully; "w but perhaps another time? perhaps when you need more—I am not in any hurry. Perhaps I am you to marry; the Signor thinks so. But another tim

Miss Lottie? Whenever you want me, you have but to say the word."

"Oh, don't think of it. I will never, never say the word. Forget it altogether, Mr. Purcell. I am very, very much obliged to you, but indeed it can never be."

The young man's countenance fell. Then he recovered himself. "I can't think you are taking everything into consideration. We should have a nice home, plenty of everything, and I should never spare trouble to give you everything you were used to——"

"Oh, go away, go away!" she cried.

And as they stood there, some one else, his shadow slowly moving before him, came round the corner of the pathway, among the chestnut-trees; and Purcell felt that his opportunity was over. He was not sorry for it. He had done what was set before him, and if he had not succeeded, he was not discouraged. There was still hope for another time.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BUSINESS, OR LOVE?

It was not only in the mind of young Purcell that Lottie's circumstances and prospects were the subject of thought. Rollo Ridsdale had not watched and worshipped as the young musician had done. Nor had he, even on his first introduction to her, looked upon Lottie as anything but the possessor of a beautiful voice, of which use might be made, for her benefit no doubt in the long run, but primarily for his own. She was not a divinity; she was not even a woman; she was a valuable stock-in-trade, a most important implement with which to work. Rollo had gone through a very effectual training in this kind. He had run through the little money he possessed so soon, and had learned the use of his wits so early, that the most energetic of tradesmen was not more alive to all the charms of gain than he. The means, perhaps, may be of a different kind, but it does not very much matter in principle whether a man is trained to sharp bargains in bric-à-brac or in cotton bales; and it is not essentially a loftier trade to speculate in pictures and china than in shares and stocks. This young aristocrat

had kept his eyes very wide open to anything that might come in his way. He was not a director of companies chiefly because his poor little Honourable was not a sufficiently valuable possession to be traded upon, though it had some small value pecuniarily. Lord Courtland himself might indeed have made a few hundreds a year out of his title, but to his second son the name was not worth so much. It secured him some advantages. It gave him the *entrée* to places where things were to be "picked up," and it helped him to puff and even to dispose of the wares which he might have in hand. It kept him afloat; it ameliorated poverty; it took away all objections to the sale and barter in which, profitably or unprofitably, he spent so much of his life. Had he gone upon the Stock Exchange, society might have made comments on the strange necessity; but when Rollo's collection of *objets d'art* was sold, nobody found anything to object to in the transaction, which put a comfortable sum in his pocket, and enabled him to go forth to fresh fields and pastures new; neither was there anything unbecoming his nobility in the enterprise which he had now in hand. Theatres are not generally a flourishing branch of commerce; yet it cannot be denied that those who ruin themselves by them embark in the enterprise with as warm an inclination towards success as any shopkeeper could boast of. Rollo had thought of Lottie's voice as something quite distinct

from any personality. It was a commodity he would like to buy, as he would have liked to buy a picture, or anything rare and beautiful, of which he could be sure that he would get more than his own money for it. In that, as in other things, he would have bought in the cheapest market and sold in the dearest. He would have thought it only right and natural to secure at a low rate the early services of a prima donna. A certain amount of enthusiasm no doubt mingled with the business; just as, had Rollo bought a picture and sold it again, he would have derived a considerable amount of enjoyment from it over and above the profit which went into his pocket; but still he would not have bought the picture, or sought out the future prima donna, on any less urgent and straightforward stimulus than that of gain. Probably, too, the artistic temperament—those characteristics which have to answer for so many things—influenced him more in the pursuit of the talent which was to make his fortune, than any man is ever influenced by bales of cotton or railway shares. To hear that "shirtings are firm" does not thrill the heart as it does to hear the melody of a lovely new voice, which you feel will pay you nobly by transporting the rest of the world as it does yourself. Neither could any amount of coupons fill you with delight like that small scrap of a Bellini by which you hope to *faire fortune*. But, nevertheless, to make his fortune was what Rollo thought of just as much as

the man who sells dusters over his counter. If a new kind of duster could be found more efficacious than any previously known, a something that would dust by itself, that would sell by the million, no doubt the shopkeeper, too, would feel a moment's enthusiasm; yet in this he would be quite inferior to the inventor of a new prima donna, who, added to his enjoyment of all that the public gave to hear her, would have the same enjoyment as had the public, without giving anything for it at all.

This had been the simple enthusiasm in Rollo's mind up to his last meeting with Lottie Despard. He had pursued her closely that he might fully understand and know all the qualities of her voice—of the slave he wanted to buy: to know exactly what training it would want, and how much would have to be done to it before it could appear before the public, and begin to pay back what he had given for it. And point by point, as he pursued this quest of his, he had noted in her the qualities of beauty, the grace, the expression, the perfection of form and feature, which were so many additional advantages. The rush of colour to her cheek, of spirit or softness to her eyes, had delighted him, as proving in her the power to be an actress as well as a singer. He studied all her looks, interpreted her character to himself, and watched her movements with this end, with a frank indifference to every other, not even thinking what interpretation

might be put, what interpretation she might her put, upon this close and anxious attention. It not till the evening when, overcome by the feeli which music and excitement had roused in her, Lc had fled alone to her home, avoiding his escort, he had suddenly awoke to the consciousness tha was no mere voice, but a young and beautiful won with whom he was dealing. The awakening gave a shock—yet there was pleasure in it, and a flatte consciousness that his prima donna had all along t regarding him in no abstract, but an entirely i vidual, way. Rollo had been brought up among ficial sentiments. He had been used to hear pe talk of the effect of music upon their imagination- the sensations it gave them, and the manner in wl they were dominated by it. But he had never s any one honestly moved like Lottie—abandoning sphere of her social success, silent in the height of triumph. When he saw that she could not and wc not sing again after that wonderful sacred song, was himself more vividly impressed than he had been by music. It took her voice from her, and breath—transported her out of herself. How stra it was, yet how real, how natural! just (when you c to think of it) as a pure and elevated mind ough be touched: though he had never yet seen the fu of art get so completely into any head before. T reality of Lottie's emotion had awakened Rollo.

was not touched himself by Handel, but he was touched by Lottie. He suddenly saw *her* through the mist of his own preconceived ideas, and through the cloud of conventionalities, those of art and those of society alike. Never in his life before had he so suddenly and distinctly come in contact with a genuine human creature, as God had made her—feeling, moving, living according to the dictates of nature, not as she had been trained to live and feel. This is not to say that he had met with no genuine people in his life. His father and mother were real enough, and so was his aunt, Lady Caroline—very real, each in his or her little setting of conveniences and necessities. He knew them, and was quite indifferent to knowing them. But Lottie was altogether detached from the atmosphere in which these good people lived. And he had discovered her suddenly, making acquaintance with her in a moment—finding her out as an astronomer, all alone with the crowds of heaven, finds out a new star. This was how it made so great an impression on him. He had discovered her, standing quite alone among all the women who knew how to express and to control their emotions. She was not trained either to one or the other. The emotion, the enthusiasm in her got the upper hand of her, not she of them. A man who is only used to men and women in the secondary stages of well-sustained emotion is apt to be doubly impressed by the sight of genuine and artless

passion, of whatever kind it may be. He went to tc thinking not of the prima donna he had found, but the woman who had suddenly made heaven and ea real to him, as they were to her. He posted up London—that is, he flew thither in the express tr according to the dictates of his first impulse; but was so entirely carried away by this second one, t he had almost forgotten his primary purpose a gether. "Ah! that is it," he said to himself when prima donna idea once more flashed across his mi He did not want to lose sight of this, or to be neglig of anything that would help to make his fortune.

Rollo was in the greatest need of having his tune made. He had nothing except very expens habits. He was obliged to spend a great deal money in order to live, and he was obliged to live so, at least, he thought); and he had no money at Therefore a prima donna or something else was solutely necessary. Accordingly he wound himself with great energy, and tried to think no more of t other world which Lottie's touch had plunged h into. In the meantime, in this world of theatr drawing-rooms, and fashionable coteries, where peo are compelled to live, whether they will or not, at enormous cost in money, and where accordingly mor must be hunted wherever scent of it can be found, it w necessary that some one, or something, should ma Rollo Ridsdale's fortune. He rushed to his impr

sario, and roused a faint enthusiasm momentarily in the mind of that man of great undertakings. An English prima donna, a native article, about whom the English would go wild! Yes! But would they go wild over an English prima donna? Would not the first step be, ere she was presented to the public at all, to fit her with an Italian name? Signorina Carlotta Desparda—that was what she would have to be called. The impresario shook his head. "And besides, these native articles never turn out what we are led to expect," he said. He shook his head; he was sorry, very sorry, to disappoint his *confrère*, but——"

"But—I tell you, you never heard such a voice; the compass of it—the sweetness of it! *simpatica* beyond what words can say—fresh as a lark's—up to anything you can put before her—and with such power of expression. We shall be fools, utter fools, if we neglect such a chance."

"You are very warm," said the manager, rubbing his hands. "She is pretty, I suppose?"

"No," said Rollo; "she is beautiful—and with the carriage of a queen." (Poor Lottie, in her white frock; how little she knew that there was anything queenlike about her!) "Come down and see her. That is all I ask of you. Come and hear her——"

"Where may that be?" said the Manager. "I am leaving town on Monday. Can't we have her up to your rooms, or somewhere at hand?"

"My rooms!" said Rollo, thunderstruck. He knew very little about Lottie, except that she was a poor Chevalier's daughter; but he felt that he could have as easily invited one of the Princesses to come and sing in his rooms, that the representatives of the new opera company might judge of her gifts. His face grew so long that his colleague laughed.

"Is she a personage then, Ridsdale? Is she one of your great friends?" he said.

"She is one of my—friends; but she is not a great personage," said Rollo, gloomily, pulling the little peaked beard which he cultivated, and thinking that it would be as difficult to get his manager invited to the Deanery as it would be to bring Lottie to Jermyn Street. These were difficulties which he had not foreseen. He went over the circumstances hurriedly, trying to think what he could do. Could he venture to go in suddenly to the Chevalier's lodge, as he had done with Lady Caroline's credentials in his pocket, but this time without any credentials, and without further ceremony proceed to test the powers of the girl, who he knew was not always compliant nor to be reckoned on? What if she should decline to be tried? What if she had no intention of becoming a singer at all? What if the Manager should condemn her voice as untrained (which it was), or even mistake it altogether, mixing it up with the cracked tones of the

old piano, and the jingle of the Abbey bells? He had not thought of all these difficuties before. He had not taken time to ask if Lottie would be docile, if Lady Caroline would be complaisant. He pulled his beard, his face growing longer and longer. At last he said,—

"I'll tell you what we can do. We can go to Mrs. O'Shaughnessy——"

"Who on earth is Mrs. O'Shaughnessy?" said the Manager.

"But very likely there is no piano there! You see, this is a difficulty I did not think of. I have heard this lady only in the house of—one of my relations, a very rigid old person, who hates theatres, and thinks opera an invention of the devil." How Rollo dared slander poor Lady Caroline so, who liked an opera-box as well as any one else, it is impossible to say.

"Well—it doesn't seem to matter much what are the qualities of the voice if we can't hear it," the Manager said carelessly; and he told his fashionable partner of the singer he had heard of in Milan, who was to distance all the singers then on the operatic stage. "They are all like that," he said—"like this private nightingale of yours, Ridsdale—till you hear them; and then they turn out to be very much like the rest. To tell the truth, I am not so very sorry this particular *protégée* of yours has broken down; for I

don't believe the time has come for an English prima donna, if it ever comes. We've got no confidence in ourselves, so far as art goes—especially musical art. English opera, sir; there's many fine pieces, but you'll never keep it up in England. It might make a hit, perhaps, in Germany, or even France, but not here. Your English prima donna would be considered fit for the music halls. We'd have to dress her up in vowels, and turn her into an Italian. Contemptible? Oh, yes, it's contemptible; but, if we're to make our own money out of it, we mustn't trouble ourselves about what's contemptible. What we've got to do is to please the public. I'm just as glad that this idea of yours has broken down."

"Broken down! I will never allow it has broken down. It is much easier and pleasanter, of course, to go to Milan than to go to St. Michael's," said Rollo disdainfully. "But never mind; if you don't start till Monday, trust me to arrange it somehow. Your new Milanese, of course, will be like all the rest. She will have been brought up to it. She will know how to do one thing, and no more; but this is genius—owing nothing to education and everything to nature. Capable of—I could not say what such a voice and such a woman is not capable of——"

"Bravo, Ridsdale!" said his partner. "She is capable of stirring you up thoroughly, that is clear—and I hope

he will be kind to you," he said, with a big laugh, ıll of insinuations. The man was vulgar and fat, but mountain of energy, and Rollo though disgusted, ɔuld not afford to quarrel with him.

"You are entirely out in your notion," he said, with ıat air of dignity which is apt to look fictitious in ıch circumstances. He was not himself easily shocked, or would this interpretation of his motives have apeared to him at all unlikely in the case of another ıan; therefore, as was natural, his gravity and look of isgust only confirmed the suspicions of the other, and mused him the more.

"Bravo, my boy; go in and win!" he said, chuckng; "promise whatever you like, if you find it necesıry, and trust to me to back you up."

To say "I am unable to understand what you ıean," as Rollo did, with cold displeasure, yet conɔiousness, did but increase the ecstasy of the fat Ianager over the evident fact that his fastidious friend ·as "caught at last."

Rollo went away with a great deal of offended ignity, holding himself stiffly erect, body and soul. He ıad never been so entirely disgusted, revolted, by the ·oarse character of the ideas and insinuations, which n themselves were not particularly novel, he was aware. [t was because everything grew coarse under the touch of such a fellow as this, he said to himself; and it

st be allowed that vice, stripped of all sentiment
d adornment, was a disgusting spectacle. Rollo had
ever been a vicious man. He had taken it calmly in
thers, acknowledging that, if they liked it, he had no
right to interfere; but he had not cared for it much
himself—he was not a man of passions. A dilettante
generally does avoid these coarser snares of humanity;
and there had always been a sense of nausea in his
mind when he was brought in contact with the vicious.
But this nausea had been more physical than spiritual.
It was not virtue but temperament which produced it;
his own temptations were not in this kind. Nevertheless, he knew that to show any exaggerated feeling on
the subject would only expose him to laughter, and he
was not courageous enough either to blame warmly
others, or to decry strenuously in himself, the existence
of unlawful bonds. What did it matter to anybody
he were virtuous? his neighbours were not on that
count to be baulked of their cakes and ale; his
inclination towards sins of the grosser kind was not a
thing he was proud of—it was a constitutional peculiarity, like inability to ascend heights or to go to sea
without suffering. He was not at all sure that it was
not a sign of weakness—a thing to be kept out of
sight. Accordingly he took his part in the social
gossip, which has no warmer interest than this, like
everybody else, never pretended to any superiority
and took it for granted that now and then everybody

"went wrong." He would have been a monster if he had done anything else. Why, even his good aunt Caroline—the best and stupidest of women, to whom, if she had desired it, no opportunity of going wrong had ever presented itself—liked to hear these stories and believed them implicitly, and was convinced that not to go wrong was quite exceptional. Rollo was not the man to emancipate himself from such a complete and universal understanding. He allowed it calmly, and did not pretend either to disapprove or to doubt. Probably he had himself coldly, and as a matter of course, "gone wrong" too in his day, and certainly he had never given himself out as at all better than his neighbours. Was it only the coarseness of his vulgar associate which made the suggestion so deeply disgusting to him now?

He asked himself this question as, disappointed and annoyed, he left the Manager's ostentatious rooms; and a new sense of unkindness, ungenerosity, unmanliness in having exposed a harmless person, a woman whose reputation should be sacred, to such animadversions, suddenly came into his mind, he could not tell how. This view of the matter had never occurred to Rollo before. The women he had heard discussed —and he had heard almost everybody discussed, from the highest to the lowest—had nothing sacred about them to the laughing gossips who discussed all they had done, or might have done, or might be going to

do. This, too, was a new idea to him. Who wa there whom he had not heard spoken of? ladies thousand times more important than Miss Despar the poor Chevalier's daughter at St. Michael's—an nobody had seemed to think there was any harm i it. A man's duty not to let a woman be lightly spoke of? Pooh! What an exaggerated sentimental piece nonsense! Why should not women take their chanc like any one else? Rollo was like most other perso when in a mental difficulty of this kind. He was n so much discussing with himself as he was the aren of a discussion which unseen arguers were holdin within him. While one of these uttered this Pool another replied, with a heat and fervour altogether u known to the clubs, What had Lottie Despard done t subject herself to these suggestions? she who knew n thing about society and its evil thoughts—she who ha it in her to be uplifted and transported by the musi at which these other people, at the best, would cla their hands and applaud. The argument in Rollo mind went all against himself and his class. He hate not only his manager-partner, whom it was perfect right and natural to hate, but himself and all the re of his kind. He was so much disgusted, that he a most made up his mind to let fortune and the Engli prima donna go together, and to take no further st to make the girl known to those who were so incapab of appreciating her. But when he came that leng

ollo had reached the end of his tether, struck against ıe uttermost limits of his horizon—and thus was rought back suddenly to the question how he was est to make his prize known?

## CHAPTER XX.

### AN UNCONSCIOUS TRIAL.

It turned out, however, that Rollo could not accomplish the object, which he had aimed at with so much eagerness and hope, in the only legitimate way. He could not get his Manager invited to the Deanery. "I don't think your aunt would like it; I don't think I could sanction it," the Dean said, whom he met at his club. Unfortunately the Dean had somewhere encountered the partner by whose aid Rollo expected to make his fortune, and he made it the subject of a little discourse, which Rollo received with impatience. "I would have nothing to do with him if I were you," his Reverence said; "he is not a kind of man to be any credit to his associates. You can't touch pitch without being defiled. I would not have anything to say to him if I were you."

"Nor should I, uncle, if I were you," said Rollo, with a rueful smile. He was not aware that this was not original; he was not thinking, indeed, of originality, but of the emergency, which he felt was very difficult to deal with.

"Nonsense!" said the Dean; "don't tell me that.

are not a great many better occupations going than that of managing a theatre——"

"Opera—opera. Give us our due at least——"

"What difference is there?" said the Dean sternly. "The opera has ruined just as many men as the theatre. Talk of making your fortune? Did you ever hear of the lessee of a theatre making a fortune? Plenty have been ruined by it, and never one made rich that I ever heard of. Why can't you go into diplomacy or to a public office, or get your Uncle Urban to give you something? You ought not to have anything to do with such a venture as this."

"My dear uncle," said Rollo, "you know well enough how many things I have tried. Uncles are very kind (as in your case), but they can't take all their relations upon their shoulders; and you knew this was what I was doing, and Aunt Caroline knew——"

"Ah! yes; I recollect that was what all the singing was about; but she could not stand that Manager fellow. I could not stand him myself; as for your aunt, you could not expect it. She is very good-natured, but you could not ask her to go so far as that."

"He is a man who goes everywhere," said Rollo; "he is a man who can behave himself perfectly well wherever he is."

"Oh, bless you, she would see through him at a glance!" cried the Dean. "I don't mean to say your

aunt is clever, Rollo, but instinct
She would see through him. Miss
different; she was perfectly *comme*
wonderful sometimes in that way.
have no advantages, they seem to
just as good as any one: whereas a m
By the way, I am very sorry for the p
say her father, a disreputable sort o
never should have got the appointme
marry some low woman. It will be
girl."

What an opportunity was this of seiz
her—of overcoming any objection that
Rollo felt himself Lottie's best friend as
this complication. While she might help
fortune he could make her independent
power of any disreputable father or unde
He could not bear to think that such a g
lost in conditions so wretched, and, thou
was obdurate, he did not lose hope.
Thursday and Monday is not a very long t
negotiations, and the Manager was entirely
by his Milanese, whom another impresari
be on the track of, and in whom various
were interested. It is impossible to descr
and incredulity with which Rollo himse
partner's account of this new singer. H
*slightest* faith in her.

"I know how she will turn out," he said. "She will shriek like a peacock; she will have to be taught her own language; she will be coached up for one *rôle* and good for nothing else; and she will smell of garlic enough to kill you."

"Oh, garlic will never kill me!" said the vulgar partner who gave Rollo so much trouble.

In the meantime he wrote to the Signor to see what could be done, and begged with the utmost urgency that he would arrange something. "Perhaps the old Irishwoman next door would receive us," Rollo said, "even if she has got no piano. Try, my dear Rossinetti, I implore you; try your best." The Signor was very willing to serve the Dean's nephew; but he was at the moment very much put out by Lottie's reception of young Purcell, as much as if it had been himself that had been refused.

"Who is Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, and how am I to communicate with her?" he cried; and he did not throw himself into the work with any zeal. All that he would do at last, moved by Rollo's repeated letters, was to bid him bring his friend down to the service Sunday afternoon, when he would see Lottie at best, and hear something of her voice. The Manager grinned at this invitation. He was not an enthusiast for Handel, and shrugged his shoulders at sacred music generally as much out of his line; but he ended, having no better engagement on hand, by consenting to

go. It was the end of the season; the opera was ov and all its fashionable patrons dispersed; and Michael's was something to talk of at least. So t two connoisseurs arrived on a warm afternoon of ea August, when the grey pinnacles of the Abbey bla white in excessive sunshine, and the river showed l glowing metal here and there through the broad vall too brilliant to give much refreshment to the eyes.

As it happened, it was a chance whether Lo would attend the service that afternoon at all. S was sorry for poor Purcell, and embarrassed to f the congregation in the Abbey, some of whom at le must know the story. She was certain the Signor kn it, from the glance he had thrown at her; and h Purcell, she felt sure, would gloom at her from free seats, and the hero himself look wistful and proachful from the organ-loft. She had very nea made up her mind not to go. Would it not be bet to go out on the slopes, and sit down under a tr and hear the music softly pealing at a distance, a get a little rest out of her many troubles? Lottie l almost decided upon this, when suddenly, by a capr she changed her mind and went. Everything ca true as she had divined. Mrs. Purcell fixed her e upon her from the moment she sat down in her pl with a gloomy interest which sadly disconcerted Lot and so did old Pick, who sat by his fellow servant a chuckled over the conclusion of Mr. John's roma

while once at least Lottie caught the pale dulness of the Signor's face looking disapproval, and at every spare moment the silent appeal of Purcell's eyes looking down from over the railing of the organ-loft. Lottie's heart revolted a little in resistance to all these pitiful and disapproving looks. Why should they insist upon it? If she could not accept young Purcell, what was it to the Signor and old Pick?—though his mother might be forgiven if she felt the disappointment of her boy. The girl shrank a little from all those glances, and gave herself up altogether to her devotions. Was it to her devotions? There was the Captain chanting all the responses within hearing, cheerful and self-confident, as if the Abbey belonged to him; and there, too, was Law, exchanging glances of a totally different description with the people in the free seats. It was to two fair-haired girls whom Lottie had seen before —who were, indeed, constant in their attendance on the Sunday afternoon—that Law was signalling; and they, on their part, tittered and whispered, and looked at the Captain in his stall, and at another woman in a veil whom Lottie did not make out. This was enough to distract her from the prayers, to which, however, if only to escape from the confusion of her own thoughts, she did her very best to give full attention. But—— She put up her prayer-book in front of her face, and hid herself at least from all the crowd, *so full each of his and* her own concerns. She was

silent during the responses, hearing nothing but h father's voice with its tone of proprietorship, and on allowed herself to sing when the Captain's barito was necessarily silent. Lottie's voice had becor known to the people who sat near her. They look for her as much as they looked for little Rowley hi self, who was the first soprano; but to-day they d not get much from Lottie. Now and then she forg herself, as in the "Magnificat," when she burst fo suddenly unawares, almost taking it out of the han of the boys; but while she was singing Lottie came herself almost as suddenly, and stopped short, with quaver and shake in her voice as if the thread sound had been suddenly broken. Raising her ey in the midst of the canticle, she had seen Ro Ridsdale within a few places of her, holding his bo before him very decorously, yet looking from her to large man by his side with unmistakable meanir The surprise of seeing him whom she believed to far away, the agitation it gave her to perceive that s herself was still the chief point of interest to him, a the sudden recalling thus of her consciousness, ga her a shock which extinguished her voice altogeth There was a thrill in the music as if a string h broken; and then the hymn went on more feeb diminished in sweetness and volume, while she sto trembling, holding herself up with an effort. He h come back again, and again his thoughts were full

her, his whole attention turned to her. An instantaneous change took place in Lottie's mind. Instead of the jumble of annoyances and vexations that had been around her—the reproachful looks on one side, the family discordance on the other—her father and Law both jarring with all that Lottie wished and thought right—a flood of celestial calm poured into her soul. She was no longer angry with the two fair-haired girls who tittered and whispered through the service, looking up to Law with a hundred telegraphic communications. She was scarcely annoyed when her father's voice pealed forth again in pretentious incorrectness. She did not mind what was happening around her. The sunshine that came in among the pinnacles and fretwork above in a golden mist, lighting up every detail, yet confusing them in a dazzle and glory which common eyes could not bear, made just such an effect on the canopies of the stalls as Rollo's appearance made on Lottie's mind. She was all in a dazzle and mist of sudden calm and happiness which seemed to make everything bright, yet blurred everything in its soft, delicious glow.

"Don't think much of her," said the Manager, as they came out. The two were going back again at once to town, but Rollo's partner had supposed that at least they would first pay a visit to the Deanery. He was a *man who counted* duchesses on his roll of *acquaintances, but he liked* to add a Lady Caroline

whenever the opportunity occurred, and deans, too, had their charm. He was offended when he saw that Rollo had no such intention, and at once divined that he was not considered a proper person to be introduced to the heads of such a community. This increased his determination not to yield to his partner in this fancy of his, which, indeed, he had always considered presumptuous, finding voices being his own share of the work—a thing much too important to be trusted to an amateur. "The boy has a sweet little pipe of his own; but as for your *prima donna*, Ridsdale, if you think that sort of thing would pay with us—— No, no! my good fellow; she's a deuced handsome girl, and I wish you joy; I don't wonder that she should have turned your head; but for our new house, not if I know it, my boy. A very nice voice for an amateur, but that sort of thing does not do with the public."

"You scarcely heard her at all; and the few notes she did sing were so mixed up with those scrubby little boys——"

"Oh! I heard her, and I don't care to hear her again—unless it were in a drawing-room. Why, there's Rossinetti," said the *impresario;* "he'll tell you just the same as I do. Do you know what we're down here for, Rossinetti, eh? Deluded by Ridsdale to come *and hear* some miraculous voice, and it turns out to *be only* a charming young lady who has bewitched

him, as happens to the best of us. Pretty voice for a drawing-room, nice amateur quality; but for the profession—— I tell him you must know that as well as I."

"Come into my place and rest a little; there is no train just yet," said the Signor. He had left Purcell to play the voluntary, and led the strangers through the nave, which was still crowded with people listening to the great strains of the organ. "Come out this way," he said; "I don't want to be seen. Purcell plays quite as well as I do; but if they see me they will stream off, and hurt his feelings. Poor boy! he has had enough to vex him already."

These words were on his lips when, coming out by a private door, the three connoisseurs suddenly came upon Lottie, who was walking home with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. The Signor, who was noted for a womanish heat of partisanship and had not forgiven her for the disappointment of his pupil, darted a violent glance at her as he took off his hat. It might have been himself that she had rejected, so full of offence was his look; and this fixed the attention of the big Manager, who took off his hat too, with a smile of secret amusement, and watched the scene, making a private memorandum to the effect that Rossinetti evidently *had been hit also;* and no wonder! a handsome girl as you could see in a summer day, with a

voice that was a very nice voice, a really superior voice for an amateur.

As for Rollo, he hastened up to Mrs. O'Shaughnessy with fervour, and held out his hand; and how happy and how proud was that kind woman! She curtseyed as she took his hand as if he had been the Prince of Wales, nearly pulling him down, too, ere she recovered herself; and her countenance shone, partly with the heat, partly with the delight.

"And I hope I see *you* well, sir," she said; "and glad to see you back in St. Michael's. There's nothing like young people for keeping a place cheerful. Though we don't go into society, me and me Major, yet it's a pleasure to see the likes of you about."

Rollo had time to turn to Lottie with very eloquent looks while this speech was being addressed to him. "I am only here for half an hour," he said; "I could not resist the temptation of coming for the service."

"Oh! me dear sir, you wouldn't care so much for the sarvice if ye had as much of it as we have," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, going on well pleased. She liked to hear herself talking, and she had likewise a quick perception of the fact that, while she talked, communications of a different kind might go on between "the young folks." "Between ourselves, it's not me that *they*'ll get to stop for their playing," she said, all the more distinctly that the Signor was within hearing. "*I'd go* five miles to hear a good band. The music

was beautiful in the regiment when O'Shaughnessy was adjutant. And for me own part, Mr. Ridsdale, I'd not give the drums and the fifes for the most elegant music you could play. I don't say that I'm a judge, but I know what I like."

"Why did you stop so soon?" Rollo said, aside. "Ah! Miss Despard, was it not cruel?—A good band is an excellent thing, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. I shall try to get my uncle to have the band from the depôt to play once a week, next time I come here.—Thanks all the same for those few notes; I shall live upon them," he added fervently, "till I have the chance of hearing you again."

Lottie made no reply. It was unnecessary with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy there, and talking all the time. And, indeed, what had she to say? The words spread themselves like a balm into every corner of her heart. He would not have gone so far, nor spoken so warmly, if it had not been for the brutal indifference of the big Manager, who stood looking on at a distance, with an air of understanding a great deal more than there was to understand. The malicious knowingness in this man's eyes made Rollo doubly anxious in his civilities; and then he felt it necessary to make up to Lottie for the other's blasphemy in respect to her voice, though of this Lottie knew nothing at all.

"I shall *not even have* time to see my aunt," he *said; "how fortunate that* I have had this opportunity

of a word with you! I did not know whether I might take the liberty to call."

"And welcome, Mr. Ridsdale," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. "Lottie's but a child, so to speak; but I and the Major would be proud to see you. And of an afternoon we're always at home, and, though I say it as shouldn't, as good a cup of tea to offer ye as ye'd get from me Lady Caroline herself. It's ready now, if you'll accept the refreshment, you and—your friend."

"A thousand thanks, but we must not stay. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, if you see my aunt will you explain how it was I could not come to see her? And be sure you tell her you met me at the Abbey door, or she will not like it. Miss Despard, Augusta is coming home, and I hope to be at the Deanery next month. *Then* I trust you will be more generous, and not stop singing as soon as you see me. What had I done?" he cried in his appealing voice. "Yes, Rossinetti, I'm coming.—Not Good-bye, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy; only, as the French say, Till we meet again."

"And I hope that will not be long," said the good woman, delighted. She swept along the Dean's Walk, letting her dress trail after her and holding her head high; she was too much excited to think of holding up her skirts. "Did ye hear him, Lottie, me honey? 'If you see my aunt,' says he. Lord bless the man! as *if me* Lady Caroline was in the way of looking in and *taking* a cup of tea! Sure, I'd make her welcome, and

more sense than shutting herself up in that old house, and never stirring, no, not to save her life. 'If ye see my aunt,' says he. Oh, yes! me darlint, I'll see her, shut up in her state, and looking as if—— He'll find the difference when he comes to the Deanery, as he says. Not for you, Lottie, me dear; you're one of themselves, so to speak. But it's not much thanks me Lady Caroline will give him for sending her a message by Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. I thought I'd burst out in his face, 'Tell her ye met me by the Abbey door.' That's to save me lady's feelings, Lottie. But I'll do his bidding next time I see her; I'll make no bones of it, I'll up and give her my message. Lord! just to see how me lady would take it. See if I don't now. For him, he's a jewel, take me word for it, Lottie; and ye'll be a silly girl, me honey, if you let a gentleman like Mr. Ridsdale slip through your fingers. A real gentleman—ye can see as much by his manners. If I'd been a duchess, Lottie, me dear, what more could he say?"

Lottie made no reply to this speech, any more than to the words Rollo himself had addressed to her. Her mind was all in a confused maze of happy thoughts and anticipations. His looks, his words, were all turned to the same delicious meaning; and he was coming back to the Deanery, when she was to be "more generous" *to him. No compliment could have been so penetrating as that soft* reproach. Lottie had no

words to spend upon her old friend, who, for her part, was sufficiently exhilarated to require no answer. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy rang the changes upon this subject all the way to the Lodges. "'When you see my aunt,' says he." The idea that she was in the habit of visitting Lady Caroline familiarly not only amused but flattered her, though it was difficult enough to understand how this latter effect could come about.

Rollo was himself moved more than he could have imagined possible by this encounter. He said nothing as he followed his companions to the Signor's house, and did not even remark what they were saying, so occupied was he in going over again the trivial events of the last few minutes. As he did so, it occurred to him for the first time that Lottie had not so much as spoken to him all the time; not a word had she said, though he had found no deficiency in her. It was evident, then, that there might be a meeting which should fill a man's mind with much pleasant excitement and commotion, and leave on his thoughts a very delightful impression, without one word said by the lady. This idea amused him in the pleasant agitation of his being to which the encounter at the church door had given rise. He forgot what he had come for, and the rudeness of his partner, and the refusal of that personage to think at all of Lottie. He did not want any further discussion of this question; he had forgotten, even, that it could require to be discussed.

Somehow all at once, yet completely, Lottie had changed character to him; he did not want to talk her over with anyone, and he forgot altogether the subject upon which the conversation must necessarily turn when he followed the Signor and his big companion through the groups of people who began to emerge from the Abbey. There were a great many who stared at Rollo, knowing who he was, but none who roused him from his preoccupation. Fortunately the Dean had a cold and was not visible, and Lady Caroline did not profess to go to church in the afternoon—"It was too soon after lunch, and there were so many people, and one never felt that one had the Abbey to one's self," her ladyship said.

The Manager went off to Italy the next day, after his Milanese, without being at all restrained by Rollo, who was glad to get rid of him, and to have no more said about the English *prima donna*. He did not quite like it even, so perverse was he, when the Signor, sitting out upon his terrace, defended her against the *impresario's* hasty verdict: "She has a beautiful voice, so far as that goes," the Signor said, with the gravity of a judge; "you are mistaken if you do not admire her voice; we have had occasion to hear it, and we know what it is, so far as that goes."

"You dog!" said the jovial Manager, with a large fat laugh. *"I see something* else if I don't see that. *Ah, Rossinetti! hit too?"*

"Do you happen to know what he means?" said the Signor with profound gravity, turning his fine eyes upon Ridsdale. "Ah! it is a pleasantry, I suppose. I have not the same appreciation of humour that I might have had, had I been born an Englishman," he said, with a seriousness that was portentous, without relaxing a muscle.

Rollo, who was not aware of the vehement interest with which the Signor espoused Purcell's cause, felt the Manager's suspicions echo through his own mind. He knew how entirely disinclined he felt to enter upon this question. Was his companion right, and had the Signor been hit too? It seemed to Rollo that the wonder was how anyone could avoid that catastrophe. The Manager made very merry, as they went back to town, upon Lottie's voice and the character of the admiration which it had excited; but all this Rollo received with as much solemnity of aspect as characterised the Signor.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SEARCHINGS OF HEART.

It was not to be supposed that the visit of Rollo and his companion should pass unnoticed in so small a community as that of St. Michael's, where everybody knew him, and in which he had all the importance naturally belonging to a member, so to speak, of the reigning family. Everybody noticed his appearance in the Abbey, and it soon became a matter of general talk that he was not at the Deanery, but had come down from town expressly for the service, returning by as early a train afterwards as the Sunday regulations of the railway allowed. What did he come for? Not o see his relations, which would have been a com- rehensible reason for so brief a visit. He had been en talking to somebody at the north door, and he d been seen following the Signor, in company with arge and brilliant person who wore more rings and ls and *breloques* than had ever been seen at Michael's. Finally, this remarkable stranger, who evidently a friend of the Signor as well as of , had been *visible on the* little green terrace out- *Rossinetti's sitting-room*, smoking cigarettes and

drinking claret-cup, and tilting up his chair upon two legs in a manner which suggested a tea-garden, critics said, more than a studious nook sheltered among the buttresses of the Abbey. Public opinion was instinctively unfavourable to Rollo's companion; but what was the young prince, Lady Caroline's nephew, doing there? Then the question arose, who was it to whom Rollo had been talking at the north door? All the Canons and their wives, and the ladies in the Lodges, and even the townspeople, when the story reached them, cried out "Impossible!" when they were told that it was Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. But that lady had no intention of concealing the honour done her. She published it, so to speak, on the housetops. She neglected no occasion of making her friends acquainted with all the particulars of the interview. "And who should it have been but me?" she said. "Is there e'er another one at St. Michael's that knows as much of his family? Who was it but an uncle of his, or maybe it might be a cousin, that was in the regiment with us and O'Shaughnessy's greatest friend? Many's the good turn the Major's done him; and, say the worst you can o' the Ridsdales, it's not ungrateful they are. It's women that are little in their ways. What does a real gentleman care for our little quarrels and the visiting list at the Deanery? 'When ye see me aunt,' says he, 'Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, ye'll tell her——' Sure he took it for certain that me Lady Caroline was a good neighbour,

ıd would step in of an afternoon for her bit of talk ıd her cup o' tea. 'You'll tell her,' says he, 'that I ıdn't time to go and see her.' And, please God, I ill do it when I've got the chance. If her ladyship rgets her manners, it shall ne'er be said that O'Shaugh-ssy's wife was wanting in good breeding to a family e Major had such close connections with."

"But do you really know—Mr. Ridsdale's family?" id Lottie, after one of these brilliant addresses, some-hat bewildered by her recollection of what had passed. ınd, sure, didn't you hear me say so? Is it doubting e word you are?" said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, with a inkle in her eye. Lottie was bewildered—but it did ıt matter much. At this moment nothing seemed to atter very much. She had been dull, and she had en troubled by many things before the wonderful oment in which she had discovered Rollo close to r in the Abbey—much troubled, foreseeing with dis-ay the closing in around her of a network of new sociations in which there could be nothing but pain ıd shame, and dull with a heavy depression of dul-ss which no ray of light in the present, no expecta-ɔn in the future, seemed to brighten. Purcell's hand ld out to her, tenderly, yet half in pity, had been e only personal encouragement she had; and that ıd humbled her to the dust, even though she struggled ith herself to do *him justice.* Her heart had been *heavy as lead. There had* seemed to her nothing

that was hopeful, nothing that was happy before her. Now all the heaviness had flown away. Why? Why, for no reason at all, because this young man, whom she supposed (without any warrant for the foolish idea) to love her, had come back for an hour or two; because he was coming back on a visit. The visit was not to her, nor had she probable share in the enjoyments to be provided for Lady Caroline's nephew; and Lottie did not love him to make his very presence a delight to her. She did not love him—yet. This was the unexpressed feeling in her mind; but when a girl has got so far as this it may be supposed that the visit of the lover whom she does not love—yet, must fill her with a thousand delightful tremors. How could she doubt his sentiments? What was it that brought him back and back again to St. Michael's? And to be led along that flowery way to the bower of bliss at the end of it, to be persuaded into love by all the flatteries and worship of a lover so delicately impassioned—could a girl's imagination conceive anything more exquisite?—No, she was not in love—yet—— But there was no reason why she should not be, except the soft maidenly reluctance, the shy retreat before one who kept advancing, the instinct of coy resistance to an inevitable delight.

Into this delicate world of happiness, in which there was nothing real, but all imagination, Lottie was delivered over that bright Sunday. She had no defence

against it, and she did not wish to have any. She gave herself up to the dream. After that interval of heaviness, of darkness, when there was no pleasant delusion to support her, and life, with all its difficulties and dangers, became so real, confronting her at every point, what an escape it was for Lottie to find herself again under the dreamy skies of that fool's paradise! It was the Garden of Eden to her. She thought it was the true world, and the other the false one. The vague terror and disgust with which her father's new plans filled her mind floated away like a mist; and, as for Law, what so easy as to carry him with her into the better world where she was going? Her mind in a moment was lightened of its load. She had left home heavily; she went back scarcely able to keep from singing in the excess of her light-heartedness, more lifted above earth than if any positive good had come to her. So long as the good is coming, and exists in the imagination only, how much more entrancing is it than anything real that ever can be ours!

The same event, however, which had so much effect upon Lottie acted upon her family too in a manner for which she was far from being prepared. Captain Despard came in as much elated visibly as she was in her heart. There had been but little intercourse among them since the *evening* when the Captain had made *those inquiries about Rollo*, which Lottie resented so

deeply. The storm had blown over, and she had nominally forgiven Law for going over to the enemy's side; but Lottie's heart had been shut even against her brother since that night. He had forsaken her, and she had not been able to pass over his desertion of her cause. However, her heart had softened with her happiness, and she made his tea for him now more genially than she had done for weeks before. They seated themselves round the table with, perhaps, less constraint than usual—a result due to the smiling aspect of the Captain as well as to the softened sentiment in Lottie's heart. Once upon a time a family tea was a favourite feature in English literature, from Cowper down to Dickens, not to speak of the more exclusively domestic fiction of which it is the chosen banquet. A great deal has been said of this nondescript (and indigestible) meal. But perhaps there must be a drawing of the curtains, a wheeling-in of the sofa, a suggestion of warmth and comfort in contradistinction to storms and chills outside, as in the Opium-eater's picture of his cottage, to carry out the ideal—circumstances altogether wanting to the tea of the Despards, which was *eaten* (*passez-moi le mot*, for is it not the bread-and-butter that makes the meal?) in the warmest hour of an August afternoon. The window, indeed, was open, and the Dean's Walk, by which the townspeople were coming and going in considerable numbers, as they always did on Sunday, was visible

with its gay groups, and the prospect outside was more agreeable than the meal within. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, next door, had loosed her cap-strings, and fanned herself at intervals as she sipped her tea. "It's hot, but sure it cools you after," she was saying to her Major. The Despards, however, were not fat, and did not show the heat like their neighbours. Law sat at the table and pegged away resolutely at his bread-and-butter, having nothing to take his mind off his food, and no very exciting prospect of supper to sustain him. But the Captain took his tea daintily, as one who had heard of a roast fowl and sausages to be ready by nine o'clock, and was, therefore, more or less indifferent to the bread-and-butter. He patted Lottie on the shoulder as she gave him his tea.

"My child," he said, "I was wrong the other day. It is not every man that would own it so frankly; but I have always been a candid man, though it has damaged me often. When I am in the wrong I am bound to confess it. Take my hand, Lottie, my love. I made a mistake."

Lottie looked at him surprised. He had taken her hand and held it, shaking it, half-playfully, in his own.

"My love," he said, "you are not so candid as your poor father. You will get on all the better in the world. I withdraw everything I said, Lottie. All is going well; *all is for the best.* I make no doubt you *can manage your own affairs* a great deal better than I."

"What is it you mean, papa?"

"We will say no more, my child. I give you free command over yourself. That was a fine anthem this afternoon, and I have no doubt those were well repaid who came from a distance to hear it. Don't you think so, Lottie? Many people come from a great distance to hear the service in the Abbey, and no doubt the Signor made it known that there was to be such a good anthem to-day."

Lottie did not make any reply. She looked at him with mingled wonder and impatience. What did he mean? It had not occurred to her to connect Rollo with the anthem, but she perceived by the look on her father's face that something which would be displeasing to her was in his mind.

"What's the row?" said Law. "Who was there? I thought it was always the same old lot."

"And so it is generally the same old lot. *We* don't vary; but when pretty girls like Lottie say their prayers regularly heaven sends somebody to hear them. Oh, yes; there is always somebody sent to hear them. But you are quite right to allow nothing to be said about it, my child," said the Captain. "Not a word, on the honour of a gentleman. Your feelings shall be respected. But it may be a comfort to you, my love, to feel that whatever happens your father is behind you, *Lottie*—knows and approves. My dear, I say no *more.*"

"By Jove! What is it?" cried Law.

"It is nothing to you," said his father. "But look here, Law. See that you don't go out all over the place and leave your sister by herself, without anyone to take care of her. My engagements I can't always give up, but don't let me hear that there's nobody to walk across the road with Lottie when she's asked out."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Law. "I thought they'd had enough of you at the Deanery, Lottie. That's going to begin again, then, I suppose?"

"I am not invited to the Deanery," said Lottie, with as much state and solemnity as she could summon up, though she trembled; "neither is it going to begin again. There is no occasion for troubling Law or you either. I always have taken care of myself hitherto, and I suppose I shall do it till the end."

"You need not get on your high horse, my child," said Captain Despard, blandly. "Don't suppose that I will interfere; but it will be a consolation to you to remember that your father is watching over you, and that his heart goes with you," he added, with an unctuous roll in his voice. He laid his hand for a moment on her head, and said, "Bless you, my love," before he turned away. The Captain's emotion was great; it almost brought the tears to his manly eyes.

"What *is the row?*" said Law, when his father had gone. Law's attention had been fully occupied during

the service with his own affairs, and he did not know of the reappearance of Rollo. "One would think he was going to cry over you, Lottie. What have you done? Engagements! he has always got some engagement or other. I never knew a fellow with such a lot of friends—I shouldn't wonder if he was going to sup somewhere to-night. I wonder what they can see in him," said Law, with a sigh.

"Law, are you going out too?"

"Oh, I suppose so; there is nothing to do in the house. What do you suppose a fellow can do? Reading is slow work; and, besides, it's Sunday, and it's wrong to work on Sunday. I shall go out and look round a bit, and see if I can see anyone I know."

"Do you ever think, I wonder," said Lottie—"papa and you—that if it is so dull for you in the house, it must sometimes be a little dull for me?"

She was not in the habit of making such appeals, but to-night there was courage and a sense of emancipation in her which made her strong.

"You? Oh, well, I don't know—you are a girl," said Law, "and girls are used to it. I don't know what you would do if you wanted to have a little fun, eh? I dare say you don't know yourself. Yes, I shouldn't wonder if it was dull; but what can anyone do? It's nature, I suppose," said Law. "There isn't *any fun* for girls, as there is for us. Well, is there? *How* should I know?"

But there was "fun" for Emma and her sisters of the workroom, Law reminded himself with a compunction. "I'll tell you what, Lottie," he said hastily; "you must just do as other girls do. You must get some one to walk with you, and talk, and all that, you know. There's nothing else to be done; and you might have plenty. There's that singing fellow, that young Purcell; they say he's in love with you. Well, he's better than nobody; and you could give him the sack as soon as you saw somebody you liked better. I thought at one time that Ridsdale——"

"I think, Law," said Lottie, "you had better go out for your walk."

He laughed. He was half-pleased to have roused and vexed her, yet half-sorry too. Poor Lottie! Now that she was abandoned by her grand admirer and all her fine friends, it must be dull for her, staying in the house by herself; but then what could he do, or anyone? It was nature. Nature, perhaps, might be to blame for not providing "fun" for girls, but it was not for Law to set nature right. When he had got his hat, however, and brushed his hair before going out, he came back and looked at Lottie with a compunction. He could not give up meeting Emma in order to take his sister for a walk, though, indeed, this idea actually did glance across his mind as a rueful possibility. No, he could *not go; he had* promised Emma to meet her *in the woods, and he* must keep his word. But he

was very sorry for Lottie. What a pity she had not some one of her own—Purcell, if nobody better! and then, when the right one came, she might throw him off. But Law did not dare to repeat his advice to this effect. He went and looked at her remorsefully. Lottie had seated herself upstairs in the little drawing-room; she was leaning her elbow on the ledge of the little deep window, and her head upon her hand. The attitude was pensive; and Law could not help thinking that to be a girl, and sit there all alone looking out of a window instead of roaming about as he did, would be something very terrible. The contrast chilled him and made him momentarily ashamed of himself. But then he reflected that there were a great many people passing up and down, and that he had often heard people say it was amusing to sit at a window. Very likely Lottie thought so; probably, on the whole, she liked that better than going out. This must be the case, he persuaded himself, or else she would have been sure to manage to get some companion; therefore he said nothing to her, but went downstairs very quietly and let himself out softly, not making any noise with the door. Law had a very pleasant walk with Emma under the trees, and enjoyed himself, but occasionally there would pass a shadow over him as he thought of Lottie sitting at the window in the little *still house* all alone.

*But indeed*, for that evening at least, Lottie was

not much to be pitied. She had her dreams to fall back upon. She had what is absolutely necessary to happiness—not only something to look back to, but something to look forward to. That is the true secret of bliss—something that is coming. With that to support us can we not bear anything? After a while, no doubt, Lottie felt, as she had often felt before, that it was dull. There was not a sound in the little house; everybody was out except herself; and it was Sunday, and she could not get her needlework to occupy her hands and help on her thoughts. As the brightness waned slowly away, and the softness of the evening lights and then the dimness of the approaching dark stole on, Lottie had a great longing to get out of doors; but she could not go and leave the house, for even the maid was out, having her Sunday walk with her young man. It was astonishing how many girls had gone wandering past the window, each with her young man. Not much wonder, perhaps, that Law had suggested this sole way of a little "fun" for a girl. Poor Law! he did not know any better; he did not mean any harm. She laughed now at the suggestion which had made her angry at the time, for to-night Lottie could afford to laugh. But when she heard the maid-servant come in, Lottie, wearied with her long vigil, and longing for a breath of cool air after the confinement of the house, *agreed with herself* that there would be no *harm in taking one little turn* upon the slopes. The

townspeople had mostly gone. Now and then a couple of the old Chevaliers would come strolling homeward, having taken a longer walk in the calm of the Sunday evening than their usual turn on the Slopes. Captain Temple and his wife had gone by arm-in-arm. Perhaps they had been down to the evening service in the town, perhaps only out for a walk, like everybody else. Gradually the strangers were disappearing; the people that belonged to the Precincts were now almost the only people about, and there was no harm in taking a little walk alone; but it was not a thing Lottie cared much to do. With a legitimate errand she would go anywhere; but for a walk! The girl was shy, and full of all those natural conventional reluctances which cannot be got out of women; but she could not stay in any longer. She went out with a little blue shawl folded like a scarf—as was the fashion of the time—over her shoulders, and flitted quickly along the Dean's Walk to the slopes. All was sweet in the soft darkness and in the evening dews, the grass moist, the trees or the sky sometimes distilling a palpable dew-drop, the air coming softly over all those miles of country to touch with the tenderest salutation Lottie's cheek. She looked out upon the little town nestling at the foot of the hill with all its twinkling lights, and upon the stars that shone over the long glimmer of the river, which showed here and there, through all the valley, pale openings of light in the dark country.

How sweet and still it was! The openness of the horizon, the distance, was the thing that did Lottie good. She cast her eyes to the very farthest limit of the world that lay within her sight and drew a long breath. Perhaps it was this that caught the attention of some one who was passing. Lottie had seated herself in a corner under a tree, and she did not see this wayfarer, who was behind her; and the reader knows that she did not sigh for sorrow, but only to relieve a bosom which was very full of fanciful anticipations, hopes, and dreams. It was not likely, however, that Mr. Ashford would know that. He too was taking his evening walk; and when he heard the sigh in which so many tender and delicious fancies exhaled into the air, he thought—who could wonder?—that it was somebody in trouble; and, drawing a little nearer to see if he could help, as was the nature of the man, found to his great surprise—as she, too, startled, turned round her face upon him—that it was Lottie Despard who was occupying the seat which was his favourite seat also. They both said "I beg your pardon" simultaneously, though it would be hard to tell why.

"I think I have seen you here before," he said. "You like this time of the evening, Miss Despard, like myself—and this view?"

"Yes," said Lottie; "but I have been sitting indoors all the afternoon, and got tired of it at last. I did not

like to come out all by myself; but I thought no one would see me now."

"Surely you may come here in all safety by yourself." The Minor Canon had too much good breeding to suggest any need of a companion or any pity for the girl left alone. Then he said suddenly, "This is an admirable chance for me. The first time we met, Miss Despard, you mentioned something about which you wished to consult me——"

"Ah!" cried Lottie, coming back out of her dreams. Yes, she had wanted to consult him, and the opportunity must not be neglected. "It was about Law, Mr. Ashford. Law—his name is Lawrence, you know, my brother; he is a great boy, almost a man—more than eighteen. But I am afraid he is very backward. I want him so very much to stand his examination. It seems that nothing—nothing can be done without that now."

"His examination—for what?"

"Oh, Mr. Ashford," said Lottie, "for anything! I don't mind what it is. I thought, perhaps, if you would take him it would make him see the good of working. We are—poor; I need not make any fuss about saying that; here we are all poor; and if I could but see Law in an office earning his living, I think," cried Lottie, with the solemnity of a martyr, "I think I should not care what happened. That was all

wanted him to come to you, that you might tell us what he would be fit for."

"He would make a good soldier," said Mr. Ashford, smiling; "though there is an examination for that too."

"There are examinations for everything, I think," said Lottie, shaking her head mournfully; "that is the dreadful thing; and you see, Mr. Ashford, we are poor. He has not a penny; he must work for his living; and how is he to get started? That is what I am always saying. But what is the use of speaking? You know what boys are. Perhaps if I had been able to insist upon it years ago—but then I was very young too. I had no sense, any more than Law."

The Minor Canon was greatly touched. The evening dew got into his eyes—he stood by her in the soft summer darkness, wondering. He was a great deal older than Lottie—old enough to be her father, he said to himself; but he had no one to give him this keen, impatient anxiety, this insight into what boys are. "Was there no one but you to insist upon it?" he said, in spite of himself.

"Well," said Lottie meditatively, "do gentlemen—generally—take much trouble about what boys are doing? I suppose they have got other things to think of."

"You have *not much opinion* of men, Miss Despard," *said the Minor Canon, with* a half-laugh.

"Oh, indeed I have!" cried Lottie. "Why do you say that? I was not thinking about men—but only—— And then boys themselves, Mr. Ashford; you know what they are. Oh! I think sometimes if I could put some of me into him. But you can't do that. You may talk, and you may coax, and you may scold, and try every way—but what does it matter? If a boy won't do anything, what is to be done with him? That is why I wanted so much, so very much, to bring him to you."

"Miss Despard," said the Minor Canon, "you may trust me that if there is anything I can do for him I will do it. As it happens, I am precisely in want of some one to—to do the same work as another pupil I have. That would be no additional trouble to me, and would not cost anything. Don't you see? Let him come to me to-morrow and begin."

"Oh, Mr. Ashford," said Lottie, "I knew by your face you were kind—but how very, very good you are! But then," she added sorrowfully, "most likely he could not do the same work as your other pupil — I am afraid he is very backward. If I were to tell you what he is doing you might know. He is reading Virgil—a book about as big as himself," she said, with a little laugh, that was very near crying. "Won't you sit down here?"

"Virgil is precisely the book my other pupil *is doing*," said Mr. Ashford, laughing too, very tenderly,

at her small joke, poor child! while she made room for him anxiously on the bench. There they sat together for a minute in silence—all alone, as it might be, in the world, nothing but darkness round them, faint streaks of light upon the horizon, distant twinkles of stars above and homely lamps below. The man's heart softened strangely within him over this creature, who, for all the pleasure she had, came out here, and apologised to him for coming alone. She who, neglected by everybody, had it in her to push forward the big lout of a brother into worthy life, putting all her delicate strength to that labour of Hercules—he felt himself getting quite foolish, moved beyond all his experiences of emotion, as, at her eager invitation, he sat down there by her side.

And as he did so other voices and steps became audible among the trees of somebody coming that way. Lottie had turned to him, and was about to say something, when the sound of the approaching voices reached them. He could see her start—then draw herself erect, close into the corner of the bench. The voices were loudly pitched, and attempted no concealment.

"La, Captain, how dark it is! Let's go home; mother will be looking for us," said one.

"My dear Polly," said the other—and though Mr. Ashford did not *know Captain* Despard, he divined *the whole story in a moment* as the pair brushed past

arm-in-arm—"my dear Polly, your home will be very close at hand next time I bring you here."

Lottie said nothing—her heart jumped up into her throat, beating so violently that she could not speak. And to the Minor Canon the whole family story seemed to roll out like the veiled landscape before him as he looked compassionately at the girl sitting speechless by his side, while her father and his companion, all unconscious in the darkness, brushed against her, sitting there unseen under the shadowy trees.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A CHANCE FOR LAW.

MR. ASHFORD took Lottie home that evening, walking with her to her own door. There was not much said; for, notwithstanding the armour of personal hope and happiness which she had put on, the shock of this personal encounter with her father and the woman who was to be her father's wife made the girl tremble with secret excitement, in spite of herself. The woman: it was this, the sight and almost touch of this new, unknown, uncomprehended being brushing past her in the darkness which overwhelmed Lottie. That first contact made the girl sick and faint. She could not talk to Mr. Ashford any more—her voice seemed to die out of her throat, where her heart was fluttering. She could not think even what she had been saying. It was all confused, driven aside into a corner, by that sudden apparition. Mr. Ashford, on his side, said little more than Lottie. It seemed to him that he had a sudden insight into all that was happening. He had heard, though without paying much attention, the common gossip about Captain Despard, who was not considered by anybody within the Precincts as a

creditable inmate; but this curious little scene, of which he had been a witness, had placed him at once in the midst of the little drama. He seemed to himself to have shared in the shock Lottie had received. He walked softly by her side, saying little, full of compassion, but too sympathetic even to express his sympathy. He would not hurt her by seeming to be sorry for her. When they parted he held her hand for a moment with a kind, serious grasp, as if he had been her father, and said:

"You will send him to me to-morrow, Miss Despard? I shall expect him to-morrow."

"Oh—Law!" she said, with a little start and recovery. Poor Law had gone out of her mind.

"Poor child!" he said, as he turned towards his house; but before he had crossed the road he was met by Captain Temple coming the other way.

"Was that Miss Despard?" asked the old man. "Is it she you were saying good-night to? My wife told me she had gone towards the Slopes, and I was on my way to bring her home."

"I met her there, and I have just brought her home," said the Minor Canon. He could scarcely make out in the dark who his questioner was.

"That is all right—that is all right," said the old *Chevalier*. "She is left too much alone, and she *should* have some one to take care of her. I

much obliged to you, Mr. Ashford, for I take a great interest in the young lady."

"It is—Captain Temple?" said Mr. Ashford, peering at the old man with contracted, short-sighted eyes. "I beg your pardon. Yes, Miss Despard is quite safe; she has been talking to me about her brother. What kind of boy is he? I only know he is a big fellow, and not very fond of his work."

Captain Temple shook his head. "What can you expect? It is not the boy's fault; but she is the one I take an interest in. You know I had once a girl of my own—just such another, Mr. Ashford—just such another. I always think of her when I see this pretty creature. Poor things — how should they know the evil that is in the world? They think everybody as good as themselves, and when they find out the difference it breaks their sweet hearts. I can't look at a young girl like that, not knowing what her next step is to bring her, without tears in my eyes."

The Minor Canon did not make any reply; his ıeart was touched, but not as Captain Temple's was ɔuched. He looked back at the dim little house, here as yet there were no lights—not thinking of ɔttie as an all-believing and innocent victim, but ˈher as a young Britomart, a helmeted and armed ıiden, *standing desperate* in defence of her little *ɹghold against powers* of evil which she was no-

ways ignorant of. It did not occur to him that these images might be conjoined, and both be true.

"I take a great interest in her," said old Captain Temple again, "and so does my wife, Mr. Ashford. My wife cannot talk of our loss as I do; but, though she says little, I can see that she keeps her eye upon Lottie. Poor child! She has no mother, and, for that matter, you might say no father either. She has a claim upon all good people. She may be thrown in your way sometimes, when none of us can be of any use to her. It would make me happy if you would say that you would keep an eye upon her too, and stand by her when she wants a friend."

"You may be sure I will do that—if ever it should be in my power."

"Thanks. You will excuse me speaking to you? Most people allow the right we have in our trouble to think of another like our own. I am quite happy to think you will be one of her knights too, Mr. Ashford. So will my wife. Ah, we owe a great deal—a great deal — to innocence. Good night, and my best thanks."

Mr. Ashford could not smile at the kind old Chevalier and his monomania. He went home very seriously to his dark little house, where no one had *lighted* his lamp. He was not so well served as the *Signor*. There was a faint light on the stairs, but none in his dark wainscoted library, where the three

small deep windows were more than ever like three luminous yet dim pictures hanging upon a gloomy wall. When he had lighted his reading-lamp the pictures were put out, and the glimmering dim interior, with its dark reflections and the touches of gilding and faded brown of his books, came into prominence. He half smiled to think of himself as one of Lottie Despard's knights; but outside of this calm and still place what a glimpse had been afforded him of the tumults and miseries of the common world, within yet outside all the calm precincts of ordered and regular life! The girl with whom he had been talking stood *aux prises* with all these forces, while he, so much more able for that battle, was calm and sheltered. To see her struggling against the impassibility of a nature less noble than her own—to think of her all forlorn and solitary, piteous in her youth and helplessness, on the verge of so many miseries, wrung his heart with pity, with tenderness, with—— Was it something of envy too? All the powers of life were surging about Lottie, contending in her and around her; forces vulgar yet powerful, calling forth in that bit of a girl, in that slim creature, made, the man thought, for all the sweetness and protections of life, all its heroic qualities instead—while for such as he, thirty-five, and a man, fate held nothing but quiet, and mastery of all circumstances, *Handel* and the Abbey! What a *travesty and interchange* of all that was fit and

natural!—for him ought to be the struggle, for her the peace; but Providence had not ordained it so.

How often is this so! times without number; the weak have to struggle while the strong look on. Women and children labour while full-grown men rest; the sick and the feeble have all the powers of darkness to encounter, while the athlete yawns his unoccupied force away. So this strange paradox of a world runs on. The Minor Canon, who was of very gentle mould, with a heart open as day to melting charities, sat and thought of it with a giddiness and vertigo of the heart. He could not change it. He could not take up Lottie's trouble and give her his calm. One cannot stand in another's place—not you in mine, nor I in yours—though you may be a hundred times more capable of my work than I. This was what Ernest Ashford thought sitting among his peaceful books, and following Lottie Despard in imagination into the little lodge which was her battlefield. Sympathy gave him the strongest mental perception of all that took place there. The only thing he had no clue to was the sweet and secret flood of consolation which subdued her sense of all her troubles—which already had drowned the dread of the future, and floated over with brightness the difficulties of the present in Lottie's heart.

Next morning Law arrived at the house of the *Minor* Canon, considerably to his own surprise, with *his big* Virgil under his arm. "I don't know whether

you meant it, or if she understood you," he said, shy and uncomfortable, looking down at his shoes, and presenting the top of his head rather than his face to Mr. Ashford's regard, "but my sister said——"

"Yes; I meant it fully. Sit down and tell me what you have been doing, and whereabouts you are in your work. I have a pupil coming presently with whom probably you might read——"

"Well, you must know that I haven't been what you might call working very hard, you know," said Law, still butting at his future instructor with the top of his head. He sat down as Mr. Ashford directed him, but he did not give up the earnest contemplation of his boots. "It isn't so easy to get into the way of it when you're working alone. I left school a long time ago—and I don't know that it was much of a school—and latterly I was a little bit irregular—and so, you know——"

"I see," said the Minor Canon; "however, it is not too late to do better. What is that big book under your arm—Virgil? Very well. Construe a passage for me, and let me see how you get on."

"Shall I do a bit I know, or a bit I don't know?" said Law, raising his head this time with a doubtful gleam, half of merriment. "Of course, I want to put my best foot *foremost—but* I don't want to take you *in all the same.*"

"I must trust you entirely on that point—or give me the book, I will choose, and chance shall decide."

"Oh, hang it!" said Law under his breath. He would have been honest and avowed what he knew; but this kind of Sortes did not please him. The perspiration came out on his forehead. Of course it was a very hard bit, or what Law thought a very hard bit, that turned up—and the way in which he struggled through it, growing hotter and hotter, redder and redder, was a sight to see.

"That will do," Mr. Ashford said, compassionate, yet horrified. "That will do." And he took the book out of his would-be pupil's hands with a sigh, and smoothed down the page, which Law had ruffled in his vain efforts, with a regretful touch, as though asking pardon of Virgil. "Suppose we have a little talk on this subject?" he said. "No doubt you have made up your mind what you would like to do?"

"Not I," said Law. "It will have to be some office or other—that's the only way in which a fellow who has no money seems to be able to make a living. A very poor living, so far as I hear—but still it is something, I suppose. That is not what I would like by nature. I'd like to go out to Australia or New Zealand. I hate the notion of being cooped up to a desk. *But I* suppose that is how it will have to be."

"Because of your sister? You would not abandon

her? It does you a great deal of credit," said the Minor Canon, with warmth.

"Well, because of her in one way," said Law; "because she is always so strong against it, and because I have no money for a start. You don't suppose that I would mind otherwise? No; Lottie is all very well, but I don't see why a man should give into her in everything. She will have to think for herself in future, and so shall I. So, if you will tell me what you think I could do, Mr. Ashford; I should say you don't think I can do anything after that try," said Law, with an upward glance of investigation, half-wistful, half-ashamed.

"Have you read English literature much? That tells nowadays," said the Minor Canon. "If you were to give any weight to my opinion, I would tell you to get the papers for the army examination, and try for that."

"Ah! that's what I should like," cried Law; "but it's impossible. Fellows can't live on their pay. Even Lottie would like me to go into the army. But it's not to be done. You can't live on your pay. English! Oh, I've read a deal of stories—*Harry Lorrequer* and *Soapy Sponge*, and that sort of—rot."

"I am afraid that will not do much good," said the Minor Canon, shaking his head. "And, indeed, I fear, if *you are going to* be successful, you must set *to work in a more serious* way. Perhaps you are good

at figures—mathematics?—no!—science, perhaps—natural history——"

"If you mean the Zoological Gardens, I like that," said Law, beginning to see the fun of this examination; "and I should be very fond of horses, if I had the chance. But that has nothing to say to an office. Figures, ha? yes, I know. But I always hated counting. I see you think there is nothing to be made of me. That is what I think myself. I have often told her so. I shall have to 'list, as I have told her." Law looked at his companion with a little curiosity as he said this, hoping to call forth an alarmed protestation.

But Mr. Ashford was not horrified. He was about to say, "It is the very best thing you could do," but stopped, on consideration, for Lottie's sake.

"You are a man to look at," he said, "though you are young. Has it never occurred to you till now to think what you would like to be? You did not think you could go on for ever stumbling over ten lines of Virgil? I beg your pardon, I don't mean to be rude; but the most of us have to live by something, and a young man like you ought to have a notion what he is going to be about. You thought of the Civil Service?"

"I suppose Lottie did," said Law, getting up and seizing his book. "It is all her doing, from first to last; it is she that has always been pushing and pushing. Yes; what's the use of trying Virgil? I always felt it was all bosh. I don't know it, and what's more

lon't want to know it. I am not one for reading; not what I would ever have chosen; it is all Lottie, h her nagging and her pushing. And so I may go ne and tell her you don't think me fit for anything?" added suddenly, with a slight break of unexpected ling in his voice.

"Don't do anything of the kind. If you would y be open with me, tell me what are your own ideas l intentions——"

"That's what everybody says," said Law, with a ile of half-amused superiority; "open your mind. t what if you've got no mind to open? *I* don't care at I do; I don't intend anything; get me in some- ere, and I'll do the best I can. A fellow can't speak r fairer than that."

The Minor Canon looked at him with that gaze of fled inquiry which is never so effectually foiled as the candid youth who has no intentions of his own l no mind to open. Law stood before him, stretch- out his useless strength, with his useless book again ler his arm—a human being thoroughly wasted; no ce for him in the Civil Service, no good use in any the offices. Why shouldn't he 'list if he wished it? was the very best thing for him to do. But when . Ashford thought of Lottie this straightforward con- sion died on his lips.

"Why *couldn't you live* on your pay?" he said iedly. "*It is only* to exercise a little self-denial.

You would have a life you liked and were fit for, and a young subaltern has just as much pay as any clerkship you could get. Why not make an effort, and determine to live on your pay? If you have the resolution you could do it. It would be better certainly than sitting behind a desk all day long."

"Wouldn't it!" said Law, with a deep breath. "Ah! but you wouldn't require to keep a horse, sitting behind your desk; you wouldn't have your mess to pay. A fellow must think of all that. I suppose you've had enough of me?" he added, looking up with a doubtful smile. "I may go away?"

"Don't go yet." There sprang up in the Minor Canon's mind a kindness for this impracticable yet thoroughly practical-minded boy, who was not wise enough to be good for anything, yet who was too wise to plunge into rash expenses and the arduous exertion of living on an officer's pay—curious instance of folly and wisdom, for even an officer's pay was surely better than no pay at all. Mr. Ashford did not want to throw Law off, and yet he could not tell what to do with him. "Will you stay and try how much you can follow of young Uxbridge's work?" he said. "I daresay you have not for the moment anything much better to do."

Law gave a glance of semi-despair from the window upon the landscape, and the distance, and morning sunshine. No! he had nothing better to

s not that he had any pleasures in hand, for
ures cost money, and he had no money to spend;
e knew by long experience that lounging about
morning without even a companion is not very
Still he yielded and sat down, with a sigh.
freedom was something, and the sensation of
obliged to keep in one place for an hour or two,
ive himself up to occupation, was disagreeable;
w might as well be in an office at once. But
bmitted. "Young Uxbridge?" he said. "What
going in for? The Guards, I suppose." Law
l; ah! that was the life. But he was aware that
mself he might just as easily aspire to be a prince
Guardsman. He took his seat at the table re-
lly, and pulled the books towards him, and looked
m with a dislike that was almost pathetic. Hate-
ols! but nothing was to be done without them.
could only manage to get in somewhere by means
little he knew of them, Law vowed in his soul
uld never look at the rubbish again.

oung Uxbridge, when he came in spick and span,
freshest of morning coats and fashionable ties—
nich things Law had a keen eye, though he could
dulge in them—looked somewhat askance at the
ing figure of the new pupil. But, though he was
on of a canon and in the best society, young
dge *was not more studious*, and he was by nature
*ss gifted, than Law.* Of two stupid young men,

one may have all the advantage over another which talent can give, without having any talent to brag of. Law was very dense with respect to books, but he understood a great deal more quickly what was said to him, and had a play of humour and meaning in his face, and sense of the amusing and absurd, if nothing more, which distinguished him from his companion, who was steadily level and obtuse all round, and never saw what anything meant. Thus, though one knew more than the other, the greater ignoramus was the more agreeable pupil of the two; and the Minor Canon began to take an amused interest in Law as Law. He kept him to luncheon after the other was gone, and encouraged the boy to talk, giving him such a meal as Law had only dreamt of. He encouraged him to talk, which perhaps was not quite right of Mr. Ashford, and heard a great deal about his family, and found out that, though Lottie was right, Law was not perhaps so utterly wrong as he thought. Law was very wrong; yet when he thus heard both sides of the question, the Minor Canon perceived that it was possible to sympathise with Lottie in her forlorn and sometimes impatient struggle against the *vis inertiæ* of this big brother, and yet on the other hand to have an amused pity for the big brother, too, who was not brutal but only dense, gaping with wonder at the finer spirit that longed and struggled to stimulate him into something above himself. So stimulated Law never

ıld be. He did not understand even what she ıted, what she would have; but he was not without ıe good in him. No doubt he would make an ex-ent settler in the back-woods, working hard there ıgh he would not work here, and ready to defend ıself against any tribe of savages; and he would not ɛe a bad soldier. But to be stimulated into a first-ıs man in an examination, or an any-class man, to made into a male Lottie of fine perceptions and ı ambition, that was what Law would never be.

"But she is quite right," said Law; "something ɜt be done. I suppose you have heard, Mr. Ash-l, as everybody seems to have heard, that the ernor is going to marry again?"

"I did hear it. Will that make a great difference ʏour sister and you?"

"Difference? I should think it would make a dif-nce. As it happens, I know P——, the woman he ɡoing to marry. She makes no secret of it that ʍn-up sons and daughters shouldn't live at home. ıall have to leave, whatever happens; and Lottie—l, in one way Lottie has more need to leave than I e: I shouldn't mind her manners and that sort of ıg—but Lottie does mind."

"Very naturally," said the Minor Canon.

"Perhaps," said Law; "but I don't know where she ɜ her *ideas from, for we* never were so very fine. *ever, I might stand it,* but Lottie never will be

able to stand it; and the question follows, what is she to do? For myself, as I say, I could 'list, and there would be an end of the matter."

"But in that case you would not be of much use to your sister."

Law shrugged his shoulders. "I should be of use to myself, which is the first thing. And then, you know—but perhaps you don't know—all this is obstinacy on Lottie's part, for she might be as well off as anyone. She might, if she liked, instead of wanting help, be able to help us all. She might start me for somewhere or other, or even make me an allowance, so that I could get into the army in the right way. When I think of what she is throwing away it makes me furious; she might make my fortune if she liked—and be very comfortable herself, too."

"And how is all this to be done?" said the Minor Canon somewhat tremulously, with a half-fantastic horror in his mind of some brutal alternative that might be in Lottie's power, some hideous marriage or sacrifice of the conventional kind. He waited for Law's answer in more anxiety than he had any right to feel, and Law on his side had a gleam of righteous indignation in his eyes, and for the moment felt himself the victim of a sister's cruelty, defrauded by her folly and unkindness of a promotion which was his due.

"*Look* here," he said solemnly, "all this she could *do without* troubling herself one bit, if she chose; she

confessed it to me herself. The Signor has made her an offer to bring her out as a singer, and to teach her himself first for nothing. That is to say, of course, she would pay him, I suppose, when he had finished her, and she had got a good engagement. You know they make loads of money, these singers—and she has got as fine a voice as any of them. Well, now, fancy, Mr. Ashford, knowing that she could set us all up in this way, and give me a thorough good start—she's refused; and after that she goes and talks about me!"

For a moment Mr. Ashford was quite silenced by this sudden assault. A bold thrust is not to be met by fine definitions, and for the first moment the Minor Canon was staggered. Was there not some natural justice in what the lout said? Then he recovered himself.

"But," he said, "there are a great many objections to being a singer." He was a little inarticulate, the sudden attack having taken away his breath. "A lady might well have objections; and the family might have objections."

"Oh! I don't mind," said Law; "if I did I should soon have told her; and you may be sure the governor doesn't mind. Not likely! The thing we want is money, and she could make as much money as ever she pleases. *And yet she* talks about me! I wish I *had her chance; the Signor* would not have to speak

twice; I would sing from morning to night if they liked."

"Would you work so hard as that? Then why don't you work a little at your books; the one is not harder than the other?"

"Work! Do you call singing a lot of songs *work?*" said the contemptuous Law.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### GOOD ADVICE.

"Oh, he did not say much," Law replied to Lottie's stioning when he went home in the afternoon. "He very jolly—asked me to stay, and gave me lunch. w they live, those fellows! Cutlets, and cold grouse, *pâté de foie gras*—something like. You girls think know about housekeeping; you only know how to ch and scrape, that's all."

Lottie did not reply, as she well might, that *pâtés foie gras* were not bought off such allowances as s; she answered rather with feminine heat, as little the purpose as her brother's taunt, "As if it mat- d what we ate! If you had grouse or if you had ad-and-cheese, what difference does it make? You e for such mean things, and nothing at all about r character or your living. *What* did Mr. Ashford ?"

"My character?" said Law. "I've done nothing ng. As for my living, I'm sure I don't know how 's to be got, neither does he. He thinks I should igrate or go into the army—just what I think my-

*He's very jolly; a kind* of man that knows what

you mean, and don't just go off on his own notions. I think," said Law, "that he thinks it very queer of you, when you could set me up quite comfortably, either in the army or abroad, not to do it. He did not say much, but I could see that he thought it very queer."

"I—could set you up—what is it you mean, Law?" Lottie was too much surprised at first to understand. "How could I set you up?" she went on, faltering. "You don't mean that you told Mr. Ashford about—— Oh, Law, you are cruel. Do you want to bring us down to the dust, and leave us no honour, no reputation at all? First thinking to enlist as a common soldier, and then—me!"

"Well, then you. Why not you as well as me, Lottie? You've just as good a right to work as I have; you're the eldest. If I am to be bullied for not reading, which I hate, why should you refuse to sing, which you like? Why, you're always squalling all over the place, even when there's nobody to hear you—you could make a very good living by it; and what's more," said Law, with great gravity, "be of all the use in the world to me."

"How could I be of use to you?" said Lottie, dropping her work upon her knee and looking up at him with wondering eyes. This was a point of view which had not struck her before, but she had begun to perceive that her indignation was wasted, and that it was she only in her family who had any idea that

a girl should be spared anything. "Law," she said piteously, "do you think it is because I don't want to work? Am I ever done working? You do a little in the morning, but I am at it all the day. Do you think Mary could keep the house as it is and do everything?"

"Pshaw!" answered Law, "anybody could do that."

Lottie was not meek by nature, and it was all she could do to restrain her rising temper. "Mary has wages, and I have none," she said. "I don't mind the work; but if there is one difference between the common people and gentlefolk, it is that girls who are ladies are not sent out to work. It is for men to work out in the world, and for women to work at home. Would you like everybody to be able to pay a shilling and go and see your sister? Oh, Law, it is for you as much as for me that I am speaking. Everybody free to stare and to talk, and I standing there before them all, to sing whatever they told me, and to be cheered, perhaps, and people clapping their hands at me—at me, your sister, a girl—— Law! you would not have it; I know you could not bear it. You would rush and pull me away, and cover me with a cloak, and hide me from those horrible people's eyes."

"Indeed I should do nothing of the sort," said Law; "I'd clap you too—I should like it. If they were hissing *it would be* a different matter. Besides, *you know, you could* change your name. They all

change their names. You might be Miss Smith, which would hurt nobody. Come, now, if you are going to be reasonable, Lottie, and discuss the matter—why your great friend Miss Huntington sang at a concert once—not for any good, not to be paid for it—only to make an exhibition of herself (and she was not much to look at either). Don't you remember? It would be nothing worse than that, and heaps of ladies do that. Then it is quite clear you must do something, and what else would you like to do?"

Lottie frowned a little, not having taken this question into consideration, as it would have been right for her to do; but the things that concerned other people had always seemed to her so much more important. She never had any doubt of her own capabilities and energies. When the question was thus put to her she paused.

"Just now I am at home; I have plenty to do," she said. Then, after another pause, "If things change here—if I cannot stay here, Law, why shouldn't we go together? You must get an appointment, and I would take care of you. I could make the money go twice as far as you would. I could help you if you had work to do at home—copying or anything—I would do it. It would not cost more for two of us than for one. I could do everything for you, even your washing; and little things besides. Oh, I don't doubt I could get quantities of little things to do," said Lottie,

with a smile of confidence in her own powers; "and no one need be the wiser. You would be thought to have enough for us both."

"Listen to me, now," said Law, who had shown many signs of impatience, not to say consternation. "What you mean is (*if* you know what you mean), that you intend to live upon me. You needn't stare; you don't think what you're saying, but that is what you really mean when all is done. Look here, Lottie; if I were to get a place I should live in lodgings. I should bring in other fellows to see me. I shouldn't want to have my sister always about. As for not spending a penny more, that means that you would give me dinners like what we have now; but when I have anything to live on, of my own, I shall not stand that. I shall not be content, I can tell you, to live as we live now. I want to be free if I get an appointment; I don't want to have you tied round my neck like a millstone; I want to have my liberty and enjoy myself. If it comes to that, I'd rather marry than have a sister always with me; but at first I shall want to have my fling and enjoy myself. And what is the use of having money," said Law, with the genuine force of conviction, "unless you can spend it upon yourself?"

Lottie was altogether taken by surprise. It was the first *time they had* thus discussed the question. *She made no reply to this* utterance of sound reason.

She sat with her work on her knee, and he
resting upon it, staring at her brother. This re
of his mind was to her altogether new.

"But, on the other side," said Law, feelin
and more confidence in himself as he became t
the sound of his own voice, and felt himself to
answerable, "on the other side, a singer gets joll
—far better than any young fellow in an office
you could quite well afford to give me an allow
so that I might get into the army as a fellow o
You might give me a hundred or two a year
never feel it; and with that I could live upon my
And you needn't be afraid that I should be asha
of you," said generous Law; "not one bit. I shc
stand by you and give you my countenance as long
you conducted yourself to my satisfaction. I sho
never forsake you. When you sang anywhere I'd
sure to go and clap you like a madman, especiall
you went under another name (they all do); t
would leave me more free. Now you must see, Lot
a young fellow in an office could not be much g
to you, but you could be of great use to me."

Still Lottie did not make any reply. No m
terrible enlightenment ever came to an unsuspect
listener. She saw gradually rising before her as
spoke, not only a new Law, but a new version of h
self till this moment unknown to her. This, as

tural, caught her attention most; it made her gasp th horror and affright. Was this herself—Lottie? was the Lottie her brother knew. That glimpse of rself through Law's eyes confounded her. She emed to see the coarse and matter-of-fact young wo- an who wanted to live upon her brother's work; to ake his dinners scanty in order that she might have share, to interfere with his companions and his plea- res—so distinctly, that her mouth was closed and r very heart seemed to stop beating. Was this her- f? Was this how she appeared to other people's es? She was too much thunderstruck, overawed by to say anything. The strange difference between is image and her own self-consciousness, her convic- n that it was for Law's advantage she had been uggling; her devotion to the interests of the family fore everything, filled her with confusion and be- lderment. Could it be she that was wrong, or was he that was unjust and cruel? The wonder and ldenness of it gave more poignant and terrible force the image of her which was evidently in Law's nd. All the selfish obtuseness of understanding, the ıbility to perceive what she meant, or to understand : object of her anxiety, which had so wounded and ubled her in Law, her brother had found in her. ) him it was apparent that what Lottie wanted was t his *good, but that she* might have some one to *k for her, some one to save* her from working. She

gazed not at Law, but at the visionary representation of herself which Law was seeing, with a pang beyond any words. She could not for the moment realise the brighter image which he made haste to present before her of the generous sister who made him an allowance, and enabled him to enter the army "as a fellow ought," and of whom he promised never to be ashamed. It is much to be doubted whether Lottie had any warm sense of humour at the best of times; certainly she showed herself quite devoid of it now. She was so hurt and sore that she could not speak. It was not true. How could he be so cruel and unjust to her? But yet could it be at all true? Was it possible that this coarse picture was like Lottie, would be taken for Lottie by anyone else? She kept looking at him after he had stopped speaking, unable to take her eyes from him, looking like a dumb creature who has no other power of remonstrance. Perhaps in other circumstances Lottie would have been so foolish and childish as to cry; now she battled vaguely, dismally, with a sense of heartbreaking injustice, yet asking herself could any part of it be true?

"Don't stare at me so," said Law; "you look as if you had never seen a fellow before. Though he was civil and did not say anything, it was easy to see that *was* what old Ashford thought. And I've got to go *back to him* to-morrow, if that will please you; and, *by the* way, he said he'd perhaps come and see you

and tell you what he thought. By Jove, it's getting late. If I don't get out at once he'll come and palaver, and I shall have to stay in and lose my afternoon, as I lost the morning. I'm off, Lottie. You need not wait for me for tea."

It did not make much difference to her when he went away, plunging down the little staircase in two or three long steps. Lottie sat like an image in stone, all the strength taken from her. She seemed to have nothing left to say to herself—no ground to stand on, no self-explanation to offer. She had exhausted all her power of self-assertion for the moment; now she paused and looked at herself as her father and brother saw her—a hard, scanty, parsimonious housekeeper, keeping them on the simplest fare, denying them indulgences, standing in their way. What if she kept the house, as she fondly hoped, like a gentleman's house, sweet and fresh, and as fair as its faded furniture permitted? What did they care for tidiness and order? What if she managed, by infinite vigilance and precaution, to pay her bills and keep the credit of the household, so far as her power went, unimpaired? They did not mind debts and duns, except at the mere moment of encountering the latter, and were entirely indifferent to the credit of the name. She was in her father's way, who before this time *would have married the* woman who brushed past *ottie on the Slopes* but for having this useless grown-

up daughter, whom he did not know how to dispose of; and if Law got an appointment (that almost impossible, yet fondly cherished, expectation which had kept a sort of forlorn brightness in the future), it now turned out that she would be in Law's way as much or more than in her father's. Lottie's heart contracted with pain; her spirit failed her. She, who had felt so strong, so capable, so anxious to inspire others with her own energy and force; she, who had felt herself the support of her family, their standard-bearer, the only one who was doing anything to uphold the falling house—in a moment she had herself fallen too, undermined even in her own opinion. Many a blow and thrust had she received in the course of her combative life, and given back with vigour and a stout heart. Never before had she lost her confidence in herself; the certainty that she was doing her best, that with her was the redeeming force, the honourable principle which might yet convert the others, and save the family, and elevate the life of the house. What she felt now was that she herself, the last prop of the Despards, was overthrown and lying in ruin. Was it possible that she was selfish too, seeking her own ease like the rest, avoiding what she disliked just the same as they did? A sudden moisture of intense pain suffused Lottie's eyes. She was too heartstruck, too *fallen* to weep. She covered her face with her hands, *though* there was no one to cover it from, with the

natural gesture of anguish, seeking to be hidden even from itself.

Lottie did not pay much attention, although she heard steps coming up the stair. What did it matter? Either it was Law, who had stricken her so wantonly to the ground; or her father, who did not care what happened to her; or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who did not count. Few other people mounted the stairs to the little drawing-room in Captain Despard's house. But when she raised her head, all pale and smileless, and saw that the visitor was Mr. Ashford, Lottie scarcely felt that this was a stranger, or that there was any occasion to exert herself and change her looks and tones. Did not he think so too? She rose up, putting down her work, and made him a solemn salutation. She did not feel capable of anything more. The Minor Canon drew back his hand, which she did not see, with the perturbation of a shy man repulsed. Lottie was not to him so unimportant a person as she was to her brother. She was surrounded by all the unconscious state of womanhood and mystery and youth—a creature with qualities beyond his ken, wonderful to him, as unknown though visible, and attracting his imagination more than any other of these wonderful mystic creatures, of whom he had naturally encountered many in his life, had ever done. His heart, which *had so swelled* with pity and admiration *on Sunday evening, was* not less sympathetic and ad-

ıring now, notwithstanding that it was through Law's yes that he had been seeing her to-day; and this epulse, which was so unlike her candour and frank- ness yesterday, gave him a little pain. He wanted to be of use to her, and he wanted to tell her so—and to repel him while he had these generous purposes in his mind seemed hard. He sat down, however, em- barrassed, on the chair she pointed him to; and look- ing at her, when thus brought nearer, he discovered, even with his short-sighted eyes, how pale she was and how woebegone. Some one had been vexing her, no doubt, poor child! This took the shyness out of Mr. Ashford's voice.

"I have come to make my report," he said, in as even a tone as he could command, "about Lawrence. He has told you—that he has been with me most of the day?"

"Yes." When Lottie saw that more than this monosyllable was expected from her, she made an effort to rouse herself. "I fear it is not anything very encouraging that you have to say?"

"I have two things to say, Miss Despard—if you will permit me. Did you ever read Lord Chester- field's Letters? But no, perhaps they are not reading for such as you. There are many wickednesses in them which would disgust you, but there is one most tragic, touching thing in them——"

He made a pause; and Lottie, who was young,

ariable, and ready to be interested in spite of herself, ooked up and asked "What is that?"

"I wonder if I may say it?—it is the effort of the ather to put himself—not a good man, but a fine, ubtle, ambitious, aspiring spirit—into his son; and he complete and terrible failure of the attempt."

"I do not know—what that can have to do with aw and me."

"Yes. Pardon me for comparing you in your enerous anxiety to a man who was not a hero. But, liss Despard, you see what I mean. You will never ut yourself into Law. He does not understand you; e is not capable of it. You must give up the at-empt. I am only a new acquaintance, but I think I ust be an old friend, somehow. I want you to give p the attempt."

He looked at her with such a kind comprehension nd pity in his eyes, that Lottie's heart sprang up a ittle from its profound depression, like a trodden-lown flower, to meet this first gleam of sunshine. She lid not quite see what he meant even now, but it was omething that meant kindness and approval of her. 'He cannot think *that* of me!" she said to herself.

"I am glad you will hear me out," he said, with a ook of relief, "for the rest is better. Law is not tupid. He *would not be* your brother if he were *upid. He is a little too* prudent, I think. He will

not hear of emigrating, because he has no money, nor of trying for the army, because he could not live on his pay. Right enough, perhaps, in both cases; but a hot-headed boy would not mind these considerations, and a fellow of resolution might succeed in either way."

"He has always been like that," said Lottie. "You see Law does not want anything very much except to be as well off as possible. He would never make up his mind what to try for. He says, anything; and anything means——Oh! Mr. Ashford, I want to ask you something about myself. Do you think it is just as bad and selfish of me to refuse to be—oh! a public singer? I thought I was right," said Lottie, putting out her hands with unconscious dramatic action, as if groping her way; "but now I am all in doubt. I don't know what to think. Is it just the same? Is it as bad of me?"

She looked at him anxiously, as if he could settle the question, and the Minor Canon did not know what reply to make. He was on both sides—feeling with her to the bottom of his heart; yet seeing, too, where the reason lay.

"I am very sure you are doing nothing either bad or selfish," he said; but hesitated and added no more.

"You won't tell me," she cried; "that must mean *that you* are against me. Mr. Ashford, I have always heard that there was a great difference between girls

and boys; like this: that for a boy to work was always honourable, but for a girl to work was letting down the family. Mamma—I don't know if she was a good judge—always said so. She said it was better to do anything than work, so as that people should know. There was a lady, who was an officer's wife, just as good as we were, but they all said she was a governess once, and were disagreeable to her. It seemed a kind of disgrace to all the children. Their mother was a governess——"

"But that is very bad; very cruel," said the Minor Canon. "I am sure, in your heart, that is not a thing of which you can approve."

"No," said Lottie, doubtfully; "except just this—that it would be far more credit, far more *right*, if the men were to try hard and keep the girls at home. That is what I thought. Oh, it is not the work I think of! Work! I like it. I don't mind what I do. But there must always be somebody for the work at home. Do you suppose Mary could manage for them if I were not here? There would be twice as much spent, and everything would be different. And do you not think, Mr. Ashford, that it would be more credit to them—better for everyone, more honourable for Law, if he were at work and I at home, rather than that people should say, "His sister is a singer?" Ah! would you let your own sister be a singer if you were as poor as we are? Or would you rather fight it out with the

world, and keep her safe at home, only serving you?"

"My sister!" said the Minor Canon. He was half-affronted, half-touched, and wholly unreasonable. "That she should never do! not so long as her brother lived to work for her—nor would I think it fit either that she should serve me."

"Ah, but there you are wrong," said Lottie, whose face was lighted up with a smile of triumph. "I thought you would be on my side! But there you are wrong. She would be happy, proud to serve you. Do you think I mean we are to be idle, not to take our share? Oh, no, no! In nature a man works and rests; but a woman never rests. Look at the poor people. The man has his time to himself in the evenings, and his wife serves him. It is quite right—it is her share. I should never, never grumble at that. Only," cried Lottie, involuntarily clasping her hands, "not to be sent outside to work there! I keep Mary for the name of the thing; because it seems right to have a servant; but if we could not afford to keep Mary do you think I would make a fuss? Oh, no, Mr. Ashford, no! I could do three times what she does. I should not mind what I did. But if it came to going out, to having it known, to letting people say, "His sister is a governess," or (far worse) "His sister is a singer"—it is that I cannot *bear.*"

Mr. Ashford was carried away by this torrent of

words, and by the natural eloquence of her eyes and impassioned voice, and varying countenance. He did not know what to say. He shook his head, but when he came to himself, and found his footing again, made what stand he could. "You forget," he said, "that all this would be of no use for yourself or your future——"

"For me!" Lottie took the words out of his mouth with a flush and glow of beautiful indignation. "Was it *me* I was thinking of? Oh, I thought you understood!" she cried.

"Let me speak, Miss Despard. Yes, I understand. You would be their servant; you would work all the brightness of your life away. You would never think of yourself; and when it suited them to make a change —say when it suited Law to marry—you would be thrown aside, and you would find yourself without a home, wearied, worn out with your work, disappointed, feeling the thanklessness, the bitterness of the world."

Lottie's face clouded over. She looked at him, half-defiant, half-appealing. "That is not how—one's brother would behave. You would not do it——"

"No; perhaps I would not do it—but, on the other hand," said Mr. Ashford, "I might do—what was as bad. I might make a sacrifice. I might—give up marrying the woman whom I loved for my sister's sake. Would that be a better thing to do?"

*Their eyes met when he spoke of the woman he*

loved—that is, he looked at Lottie, who was gazing intently at him; and strangely enough, they could not tell why, both blushed, as if the sudden contact of their looks had set their faces aglow. Lottie instinctively drew back without knowing it; and he, leaning towards her, repeated, almost with vehemence:

"Would that be a better thing to do?"

Lottie hid her face in her hands. "Oh, no, no!" she said, her sensitive frame trembling. Mr. Ashford was old, and Law was but a boy—how could there be any question of the woman either loved?

"Forgive me, Miss Despard, if I seem to go against you—my heart is all with you; but you ought to be independent," he said. "Either the woman would be sacrificed or the man would be sacrificed. And that kind of sacrifice is bad for everybody. Don't be angry with me. Sacrifices generally are bad; the more you do for others, the more selfish they become. Have you not seen that even in your little experience? There are many people who never have it in their power to be independent; but those who have should not neglect it—even if it is not in a pleasant way."

"Even if it is by—being a singer?" She lifted her head again, and once more fixed upon him eyes which were full of unshed tears. Taking counsel had never been in Lottie's way; but neither had doubt ever been in her way till now. Everything before had been very plain. Right and wrong—two broad lines straight be-

fore her; now there was right and wrong on both sides, and her landmarks were removed. She looked at her adviser as women look, to see not only what he said, but whatsoever shade of unexpressed opinion might cross his face.

"It is not so dreadful after all," he said. "It is better than many other ways. I am afraid life is hard, as you say, upon a girl, Miss Despard. She must be content with little things. This is one of the few ways in which she can really get independence—and—stop, hear me out—the power to help others too."

Lottie had almost begun a passionate remonstrance; but these last words stopped her. Though she might not like the way, still was it possible that this might be a way of setting everything right? She stopped gazing at her counsellor, her eyelids puckered with anxiety, her face quite colourless, and expressing nothing but this question. Not a pleasant way—a way of martyrdom to her pride—involving humiliation, every pang she could think of; but still, perhaps, a way of setting everything right.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A CRISIS.

When Lottie got up next morning the world seemed to have changed to her. It had changed a little in reality, as sometimes one day differs from another in autumn, the world having visibly made a more marked revolution than usual in a single night. It had got on to the end of August, and there were traces of many fiery fingers upon the leaves on the Slopes. It had been a very fine summer, but it was coming prematurely to an end, everybody said, and about the horizon there began to be veils of luminous mist in the morning, and soft haze that veiled the evening light. This autumnal aspect of the world seemed to have come on in that one night. The Virginian creeper round the window had "turned" in several patches of scarlet and yellow all at once. It was beautiful, but it was the first step towards winter and the chills—the first evidence of a year decaying which makes the spectator pause and think. When Lottie woke she felt in her heart that consciousness of something, she knew not what, something that had happened to her, that overshadowed her, and forced itself upon her before she

ould tell what it was, which is the way care manifests self at our bedsides: something that made her heart eavy the first thing on awaking. Then she remembered what it was. Lottie, we have said, was not a irl who was in the habit of taking advice; but for ıat once she had taken it, seizing upon the first trustorthy witness she could find who would bring an imartial eye to the problem of her life. She had been ery strong in her own opinion before, but when reason as put before her Lottie could not shut her eyes to . Neither could she dawdle and delay when there as anything to do. She awoke with the consciousess that some ghost was lurking behind her white ırtains. Then with a start and shiver remembered ıd realised it, and, drawing herself together, made p her mind to act at once. What was the use of ıtting off? Putting off was the reason why Law was ) backward, and Lottie was not one of those who let ıe grass grow under their feet. The more disagreeole the first step was, the more reason was there that should be taken to-day. She went downstairs with gleam of resolution in her eyes. After the shock of nding out that there is a painful thing to do, the etermination to do it at once is a relief. It brings n almost pleasure into the pain to set your face to it ravely and get done with it; there is thus an exhilaıtion *even in what is most* disagreeable. So Lottie t. *Her despondency* and depression were gone. She

had something definite to do, and she would do it, l
what obstacle soever stand in the way. She made t
family tea and cut the bread with more energy tha
usual. She was the first visible, as she always wa
but her mind was fully occupied with her own affai
and she was glad enough to be alone for half an hou
After that she had to go up again and knock at h
father's door, to remind him that there was but litt
time for breakfast before the bell began to ring f
matins; but she had taken her own breakfast an
begun her work before the Captain and Law cam
downstairs. When she had poured out their tea f
them she sat down in the window-seat with her sewin
She did not take any share in their talk, neither di
she watch, as she often did, the stir of morning li
in the Dean's Walk—the tradesmen's carts going abou
the perambulators from the town pushing upward, wit
fresh nursemaids behind, to the shady walk on t
Slopes; now and then a tall red soldier showing again
the grey wall of the Abbey opposite; the old Chevalie
beginning to turn out, taking their little morning pr
menade before the bells began. The stir was usuall
pleasant to Lottie, but she took no notice of it to-da
She was going to matins herself this morning—n
perhaps altogether for devotion, but with the idea, aft
the service, of lying in wait at the north gate for th
exit of the Signor.

How it was that the subject came under discussio

e did not know. She woke to it only when it
across herself and touched upon her own thoughts.
is Law who was saying something (it was fit for
to say so!), grumbling about the inequality of
ation, and that girls had just as good a right to
as boys.

I should like to know," he said, "why I should
to get hold of a lot of books, and trot over to
Ashford, and work like a slave till one o'clock,
: she sits as cool and as fresh as can be, and
: stirs?" He was not addressing anybody in par-
ur, but grumbling to the whole world at large,
h was Law's way. Generally his father took no
e of him, but some prick of sensation in the air
oubt moved him to-day.

Speak of things you know something about," said
Captain; "that's the best advice I can give you,
And let Lottie alone. Who wants her to work?
fresher she looks and the better she looks, the
: likely she is to get a husband; and that's a girl's
duty. Is that the bell?" said Captain Despard,
g, drawing himself up, and pulling his collar and
bands into due display. "Let me hear nothing
it work. No daughter of mine shall ever disgrace
elf and me in that way. Get yourself a husband,
child; that's the only work I'll ever permit—that's
a lady *can do. A* good husband, Lottie. If I
' *of some one coming* forward I'd be happier, I

don't deny. Bring him to the scratch, my dear; or if you're in difficulty refer him to me."

He was gone before Lottie could utter a word of the many that rushed to her lips. She turned upon Law instead, who sat and chuckled behind his roll. "If it had not been for you he would not have insulted me so!" she cried.

"Oh, insulted you! You need not be so grand. They say you may have Purcell if you like," said Law, "or even the Signor; but it's the other fellow, Ridsdale, you know, your old flame, the governor is thinking of. If you could catch *him* now! though I don't believe a fellow like that could mean anything. But even Purcell is better than nothing. If you would take my advice——"

Lottie did not stay to hear any more. He laughed as she rushed out of the room, putting up her hands to her ears. But Law was surprised that she did not strike a blow for herself before she left him. Her self-restraint had a curious effect upon the lad. "Is anything up?" he said to himself. Generally it was no difficult matter to goad Lottie to fury with allusions like this. He sat quite still and listened while she ran upstairs into her own room, which was overhead. Then Law philosophically addressed himself to what was left of the breakfast. He had an excellent appetite; and the bell ringing outside which called so many people, but not him, and the sight of the old

hevaliers streaming across the road, and the morning ngregation hurrying along to the door in the cloisters, eased him as he finished his meal, without even his ster's eye upon him to remark the ravages he made the butter. But when he heard Lottie's step coming wn stairs again Law stopped, not without a sense of ilt, and listened intently. She did not come in, hich was a relief, but his surprise was great when he ard her walk past the open door of the little dining- om, and next moment saw her flit past the window the way to the Abbey. He got up, though he had t finished, and stared after her till she, too, disap- ared in the cloister. "Something must be up," he peated to himself.

Lottie's silence, however, was not patience, neither as it any want of susceptibility to what had been id. Even this, probably, she would have felt more ad her mind not been preoccupied by her great re- olution. But when she found herself in the Abbey, bstracted from all external circumstances, the great oice of the organ filling the beautiful place, the people ilently filling up the seats, the choir in their white obes filing in, it seemed very strange to Lottie that he service could go on as it did, undisturbed by the eats of her heart and the commotion of her thoughts. Enough trouble and tumult to drown even the music vere in *that one corner* where she leant her shoulder *ainst the old dark oak*, finding some comfort in the

physical support. And she did not, it must be allowed, pay very much attention to the service; her voice joined in the responses fitfully, but her heart wandered far away. No, not far away. Mr. Ashford's counsel, and her father's, kept coming and going through her mind. Truth to tell, Captain Despard's decision against the possibility of work gave work an instant value in his daughter's eyes. We do not defend Lottie for her undutifulness; but as most of the things she had cared for in her life had been opposed by her father, and all the things against which she set her face in fierceness of youthful virtue were supported by him, it could scarcely be expected that his verdict would be very effectual with her. It gave her a little spirit and encouragement in her newly-formed resolution, and it helped her a little to overcome the prejudice in her mind when she felt that her father was in favour of that prejudice. He did not want her to work, to bring the discredit of a daughter who earned her own living upon him; he wanted to sell her to any one who would offer for her, to make her "catch" some man, to put forth wiles to attract him and bring him into her net. Lottie, who believed in love, and who believed in womanhood, with such a faith as perhaps girls only possess: what silent rage and horror filled her at this thought! She believed in *womanhood*, not so much in herself. For the sake of that *abstraction*, not for her own, she wanted to be wooed

verently, respected above all. A man, to be a per-
ct man, ought to look upon every woman as a prin-
ss of romance: not for her individual sake so much
; for his sake, that he might fall short of no nobleness
id perfection. This was Lottie's theory throughout.
ie would have Law reverence his sister, and tenderly
ire for her, because that would prove Law to be of
ie noblest kind of men. She wanted to be worship-
ed in order to prove triumphantly to herself that the
an who did so was an heroic lover. This was how
ollo had caught her imagination, her deceived imagi-
ation, which put into Rollo's looks and words so
uch that was not really there. This simple yet
iperlative thread of romance ran through all her
ioughts. She leaned back upon the carved oak of
ie stall, preoccupied, while the choristers chanted,
inking more of all this than of the service. And
ien, with a sudden pang, there came across her mind
ie thought of the descent that would be necessary
om that white pedestal of her maidenhood, the
ieltered and protected position of the girl at home,
hich alone seemed to be fit and right. She would
ave to descend from that, and gather up her spotless
ibes about her, and come out to encounter the storms
: the world. All that had elevated her in her own
onceit was going from her—and what, oh! what could
, or anyone, *find afterwards* in her? He would turn
*ay most likely with a sigh* or groan from a girl who

could thus throw away her veil and her crown and stand up and confront the world. Lottie seemed to see her downfall with the eyes of her visionary lover, and the anguish that brought with it crushed her very heart.

Did it ever occur to her that an alternative had been offered for her acceptance? Once, for a moment, she saw Purcell's melancholy face look down upon her from the organ-loft, and gave him a kind, half-sad, half-amused momentary thought. Poor fellow! she could have cried for the pain she must have given him, and yet she could have laughed, though she was ashamed of the impulse. Poor boy! it must have been only a delusion; he would forget it; he would find somebody of his own class, she said to herself, uneasy to think she had troubled him, yet with the only half-smile that circumstances had afforded her for days past. Captain Despard, had he known, would have thought Purcell's suit well worthy of consideration in the absence of a better; and the Signor, whom Lottie had made up her mind to address, darted fiery glances at her from the organ-loft, taking up his pupil's cause with heat and resentment; but she herself sailed serenely over the Purcell incident altogether, looking down upon it from supreme heights of superiority. It did not occur to her as a thing to be seriously thought of, much less in her confusion and anguish, as a reasonable way of escape. And thus the morning went

on, the chanting and the reading, and all those outcries to God and appeals to His mercy which His creatures utter daily with so much calm. Did anybody mean it when they all burst forth, "Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us?" This cry woke Lottie, and her dreaming soul came back, and she held up her clasped hands in a momentary passion of entreaty. The sudden wildness of the cry in the midst of all that stately solemnity of praying caught her visionary soul. It was as if all the rest had missed His ear, all the music and the poetry, King David harping on his harp, and Handel with his blind face raised to heaven; and nothing was left but to snatch at the garments of the Master as He went away, not hearing, not looking, or appearing not to look and hear. This poor young soul in the midst of her self-questionings and struggles woke up to the passionate reality of that cry. "Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us!" and then it went away from her again in thunders of glorious music, in solemnity of well-known words, and she lost herself once more in her own thoughts.

Lottie withdrew timidly into the aisle when the service was over. She knew the Signor would pass that way, and it seemed to her that it would be easier to speak to him there than to go to his house, which was the only *other alternative*. But the Signor, when *he came out, was encircled by* a group of his pupils,

and darted a vengeful, discouraging glance at her as he passed. He would not pause nor take any notice of the step she made towards him, the wistful look in her face. If he had seen it, it would have given him a certain pleasure to disappoint Lottie, for the Signor had a womanish element in him, and was hot and merciless in his partisanship. He cast a glance at her that might have slain her, that was as far from encouraging her as anything could be, and passed quickly by, taking no other notice. Thus her mission was fruitless; and it was the same in the afternoon, when she went out by the north door and made believe to be passing when the musician came out. To do him justice, he had no notion that she wanted him, but wondered a little to find her a second time in his way. He was obliged, as it was outside the Abbey, to take off his hat to her; but he did so in the most grudging, hasty way, and went on talking with his pupils, pretending to be doubly engaged and deeply interested in what the lads were saying. There was no chance then, short of going to his house, of carrying out her resolution for this day.

But in the evening, when all was still, Lottie, who had been sitting at home working and thinking till her heart was sick and her brain throbbing, put on her hat and went out in the dusk to get the air at the door. It was a lovely, quiet night, the moon rising over the grey pinnacles of the Abbey, marking out its

great shadow upon the Dean's Walk, and the mignonette smelling sweet in all the little gardens. A few of the old Chevaliers were still about, breathing the sweetness of the evening like Lottie herself. Captain Temple, who was among them, came up to her with his old-fashioned fatherly gallantry as soon as he saw her. "Will you take a turn, my dear?" he said. He had no child, and she had never had, so to speak, any father, at least in this way. They went up and down the terrace pavement, and then they crossed the road to the Abbey, from which, though it was so late, the tones of the great organ were beginning to steal out upon the night. "Is this a ghost that is playing, or what can the Signor be thinking of?" Captain Temple said. Old Wykeham, that gruff old guardian of the sacred place, was standing with his keys in his hands by the south door. He had not his usual rusty gown or his velvet cap, being then in an unofficial capacity; but Wykeham would not have been Wykeham without his keys. And though he was gruff he knew to whom respect was due. "Yessir, there's something going on inside. One o' the Signor's fancies. He have got some friends inside, a playing his voluntaries to them. But if you like, Captain, I will let you in in a moment, sir." "Shall we go, my dear?" the old Captain said. And next moment they were in the great gloom of the Abbey, which *was so* different in its solemnity from *the soft summer dark* outside. There was a gleam

of brilliant light in the organ-loft where the Signor w
playing, which threw transverse rays out on either si
into the darkness, showing vaguely the carved work
the canopies over the stalls, and the faded banne
that hung over them. Down in the deep gloom of t
choir below a few figures were dimly perceptib
Lottie and her kind old companion did not join the
privileged listeners. They kept outside in the nav
where the moon, which had just climbed the height
the great windows, had suddenly burst in, throwi
huge dimly-coloured pictures of the painted glass up
the floor. Lottie, who was not so sensible as she mig
have been, preferred this partial light, notwithstandi
the mystic charm of the darkness, which was som
what awful to look in upon through the open door
the choir. She put her hand, a little tremulous, on t
old Captain's arm, and stood and listened, feeling
her troubles calmed. What was it that thus calm
her perturbed soul? She thought it was the awe
the place, the spell of the darkness and the moonligh
the music that made it all wonderful. The Signor w
playing a strange piece of old music when the tw
came in. It was an old litany, and Lottie thought
she listened that she could hear an unseen choir
the far distance, high among the grey pinnacles, o
the edge of the clouds, intoning in intricate delica
circles of harmony the responses. Was it the ol
monks? Was it the angels? Who could tell? "Lotti

my love, that is the *vox humana* stop," said the kind old Captain, who knew something about it; and as he, too, was no wiser than other people, he began to whisper an explanation to her of how it was. But Lottie cared nothing about stops. She could hear the solemn singers of the past quiring far off at some unseen altar, the softened distant sweetness of the reply. Her heart rose up into the great floating circling atmosphere of song. She seemed to get breath again, to get rest to her soul: a strange impulse came over her. She, who was so shy, so uncertain of her power, so bitterly unwilling to adopt the trade that was being forced upon her: it was all that she could do to keep herself from singing, joining to those mystical spiritual voices her own that was full of life and youth. Her breast swelled, her lips came apart, her voice all but escaped from her, soaring into that celestial distance. All at once the strain stopped, and she with it, coming down to the Abbey nave again, where she stood in the midst of the dim reflected rubies and amethysts and silvery whites of a great painted window, giddy and leaning upon the old Chevalier.

"It was the *vox humana*. It is too theatrical for my taste, my dear. It was invented by——"

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Lottie, under her breath; "he is beginning again."

This *time it was the* "Pastoral Symphony" the *Signor played—music that* was never intended for the

of winter, but for the gleaming stars, the soft
ing dews, the ineffable paleness and tenderness of
ing. It came upon Lottie like those same dews
om heaven. She grasped the old man's arm, but she
ould not keep herself from the response which no
longer seemed to come back from any unseen and
mystic shrine. Why should the old monks come back
to sing, or the angels have the trouble, who have so
much else to do, when Lottie was there? When the
"Pastoral Symphony" was over the Signor went on,
and she with him. Surely there must have been some
secret understanding that no one knew of—not them-
selves. He played on unconscious, and she lifted up
her head to the moonlight and her voice to heaven
and sang—

There were shepherds watching their flocks by night.

Lottie let go her hold of the Captain's arm. She
wanted no support now. She wanted nothing but to
go on, to tell all that divine story from end to end.
It got possession of her. She did not remember even
the changes of the voices; the end of one strain and
another was nothing to her. She sang through the
whole of the songs that follow each other without
pause or a falter. And like her, without questionir
without hesitation, the Signor played on. It was
till she had proclaimed into the gloom that "His y
is easy and His burden light" that she came t

elf. The last chords thrilled and vibrated through the reat arches and died away in lingering echoes in the ast gloom of the roof. And then there was a pause.

Lottie came to herself. She was not overwhelmed nd exhausted by the effort, as she had been at the Deanery. She felt herself come down, as out of eaven, and slowly became aware of Captain Temple ooking at her with a disturbed countenance, and old Wykeham in all the agitation of alarm. "If I'd have nown I'd never have let you in. It's as much as my place is worth," the old man was saying; and Captain Temple, very kindly and fatherly, but troubled too, nd by no means happy, gave her his arm hurriedly. 'I think we had better go, my dear," he said; "I think e had better go."

Some one stopped them at the door—some one ho took her hand in his with a warmth which enusiasm permitted.

"I knew it must be you, if it were not one of the els," he said; "one or the other. I have just come; what a welcome I have had—too good for a !"

'I did not know you were here, Mr. Ridsdale," Lottie, faintly, holding fast by Captain Temple's

But I knew you were here; it was in the air," he half-*whispering.* "Good-night; but good-night *dy till to-morrow,* thank heaven."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### WHAT FOLLOWED.

CAPTAIN TEMPLE was not happy about the events of that evening. He had begun to grow very fond of Lottie, and he was not pleased that she should have "made an exhibition of herself." He went over it so often to his wife that Mrs. Temple learned the incident by heart. There was in her mind, mingled with an intense silent interest in the girl who was like her own, a feeling of repulsion too, equally intense and silent, which joined with the opposite sentiment, and kept Lottie as constantly present to her mind as she was in the Captain's talk. And, though it sometimes appeared to her that she would die of this girl, who reminded her at every step that she had lost her child, yet she could not check her husband's ever-flowing, continually repeated talk on the subject. Mrs. Temple thought this was all for his sake. Sometimes, in the bitterness of her loss, she would cry out that she loathed the very name of this other, who was so well and bright and full of life, while her child was dead and gone; but, notwithstanding, Lottie had gradually come to hold a large place in her life. How could

she help thinking of her? Grudging her very life and brightness, repenting her grudge, praying God's blessing on the girl whom she thus injured, avoiding her, fearing the sight of her, watching for her whom she feared; how could it be but that Mrs. Temple, in her lonely hours, should think of Lottie? She was the confidant now of the old Captain's regret.

"I thought she was a sweet, modest girl," he said, shaking his head; "shy, even—as I like a girl to be—very like—— My dear, I cannot bear a girl to make an exhibition of herself——"

"But if there was no one to see her, and if you were in the dark?"

"That is true, my dear; but if they did not see her they heard her. Such a voice! I wish you had been there—but that sort of public use of it—and to have the confidence to sing when she was not asked!" Captain Temple shook his head. He seemed to have done nothing but shake his head since last night.

"Do you think that the more she has a beautiful voice the less she should let it be heard?" said his wife. "I am not so taken up with this Miss Despard as you are; but still I think you are unjust to her."

"Perhaps I am unjust to her. How can I help being taken up with her? If you knew her as well you would be taken up with her too. And I wish you did; it *would be a comfort* to you. In everything she *does, her walk, every little* gesture, I see something

that reminds me—— I know you don't like to speak of it, my dear."

Mrs. Temple set her face like a rock while the old Captain talked on. He did nothing but speak of it, and she would not stop him. Had she not noticed the girl's walk? When Lottie passed Mrs. Temple turned from the window, feeling as if some one had given her a blow. Yet what had she gone to the window for but to watch for Lottie? And she was more just to her than was the old Captain, who could not bear any falling off in his ideal, who thought that a girl should never make an exhibition of herself, and did nothing for a week after but shake his head.

The singing, however, made a great excitement in the Cloisters. It was only a select few who had been there to hear; and they thought it was all the Signor's arrangement, who had provided for them so much greater a pleasure than they expected—or, rather, an additional pleasure. "Who was it?" everybody asked. Was it possible it could be little Rowley? But it was inconceivable that a mere child like that could have taken the contralto solo as well as the soprano. But was it certain that there was only one voice? The darkness was deceptive, and all the circumstances were so unusual, so out of the ordinary. When you came to think of it, it could not be one voice. It must have been little Rowley and Mellor, the big boy, who

contralto was famous. At that distance, and in the dark, it was easy to deceive yourself and think there was only one person singing. There was nothing talked about next morning but this wonderful incident, and both the people who had been there and the people who had not been there (who were piqued, and felt themselves neglected, as a matter of course) discussed it with the utmost excitement. Even before the hour of matins, old Pick, who was out upon his master's business and Mrs. Purcell's errands, was twice interviewed on the subject. The first time it was Rowley, the tenor, who assailed him, whose boy was the first soprano, and whose rights were attacked. "I should just like to know what the Signor is up to," Rowley said. "He's always got some new fad or other in his head. He'll have us all up next into that organ-loft, like a set of Christy Minstrels. Hanged if I'll go!"

"Anyhow, you'll wait till you're asked," said old Pick.

"I don't advise him to ask *me*. And, look here! I want to know who it was. If he's bringing in somebody in the dark, on the sly, to put them boys' noses out!—you never can tell what a foreign fellow's up to. I don't know a voice like that, not in the Abbey. If he's smuggling in a new boy, without no warning, to take the *bread out of* folks' mouths, by George, I *won't stand it! I'll go to* the Dean about it! Tommy's

cried hisself hoarse. He couldn't eat his breakfast poor little beggar! and he's got 'Hear my prayer' this morning. Hanged if I don't think it's all a scheme against me and my boy! That ain't a child's voice: There's a touch of falsetto in it, if I know anything about music. It won't last, not a month. I've heard them come out like that, that you could hear them a mile off, just before they break."

"Then you were there, Mr. Rowley?" said old Pick; "I thought there was only the folks from the Deanery there."

"I wasn't there. Catch me in the Abbey when I'm not wanted! I have enough of it, practising and bothering from morning till night. The Signor's very good for the organ. I don't say nothing against that; but he don't know much about Englishmen. You do no justice to your voice when you never give yourself no rest; but he can't understand that. I heard it outside. Pick, there's a good old fellow, you know what it is yourself, and I'm sure we're always glad to see you when you look in at our little place. Tell us what's up—who is it? Tommy will have to go in time. I don't say nothing against that. But he's not twelve, poor little beggar, and his voice is as clear as a bell. He's fit to fret himself into a fever if they take the first solos from him. Tell us what the Signor's up to, and who he's got coming in? I say it's a shame," said

the tenor, rising again into vehemence. "Them that is on the spot, and belonging to the place, and bred up in the Abbey all their lives, hanged if they should be turned out for strangers! I don't see the fun of that."

"If you've done, Mr. Rowley, I think I'll go," said Pick; upon which Rowley swore under his breath that it wasn't like an old friend to give a fellow no answer, and that he didn't know what he and Tommy had done to offend the Signor. To this old Pick made no reply, being himself extremely indignant not to know anything about the mystery in question. He had heard of no new boy—"nor anything as is new," Pick said to himself with warmth as he hurried through the enclosure which belonged to the lay clerks, where a great many people were at the doors and windows, and the excitement was general. It was natural that Pick should be indignant. So little as there ever was to hear or report within the Precincts, to think something should have happened under his very nose, in the Abbey, and he not know! The Signor was a good master, and the place was comfortable; but there are things which no man can be expected to stand. Even Mr. John had not said a word about any novelty. If he had told his mother, then the housekeeper had been as treacherous as the rest, and had not breathed a word to Pick. *It was a thing* that no man could be *expected to put up with.* Here were two ladies now

bearing down upon him, full of curiosity—and that Pick should have to confess that he didn't know!

"Oh, Pickering! you must know—who was it that was singing in the Abbey last night? A very extraordinary thing for the Signor to countenance. He did not ask *us;* he knew it would be of no use, for neither my husband nor I approve of such proceedings; making the Abbey, our beautiful Abbey, into a kind of music-hall! I hear it was a lady: the very worst taste, and anything *so* unecclesiastical! Women don't *exist* in the Church—not as taking any part—but these are points which foreigners never will understand," said the lady, with a sigh.

"It was odd having such a performance at all, for a few privileged persons. I thought the Abbey, at least," said the second lady, "was for all."

"Don't go, Pickering; you haven't answered my question. If I were you, being a man of experience, and having known the Abbey so long as you have done, I would give a hint to your master. You should tell him people here don't like that sort of thing. It may do very well abroad, or even in town, where there are all sorts; but it does not do in St. Michael's. You should tell him, especially as he is only half English, to be more careful. Stop a little, Pickering! You have not answered my question yet."

"*Beg* your pardon, ma'am, but you didn't give me *no time*," said Pick.

"Do not be impertinent, Pickering. I asked you a plain question, and I told you what I should do in your place. A man like you, that has been so long about the Abbey, might be of great use to your master. You should tell him that in England a lady is never suffered to open her mouth in church. I never heard of anything so unecclesiastical. I wonder the Dean does not interfere—a man of good Church principles as he is, and with so much at stake. I really wonder the Dean does not interfere."

"Oh, the Dean!" said the other lady; "and as for Church principles——"

But just then there was a tremble in the air with the first movement of the matin bells, and, without compromising his dignity or showing his ignorance, old Pick made good his escape. He went home in anything but an amiable state of mind, and went straight to the kitchen, where Mrs. Purcell was busy, as was natural at this time of the day, putting all in order and arranging for the Signor's dinner. The luncheon Mary Anne was quite equal to, but some one was coming to dinner, for whom Mrs. Purcell intended to exercise all her powers. Pick went in with a fierce glow of indignant animation, with his roll of commissions fulfilled and unfulfilled.

"There's no sweetbreads to be had," he said, "till Saturday; *they'll save you* a pair on Saturday, if you *send the order with the* man when he comes; but

they'll be six-and-six, if you think that too (Dear! I should think it was dear. How much o' goes to the veal, I wonder, and the man as fed And as for game! you might as well go a-shooting the Slopes; and what there is bringing its weight gold. I wouldn't give in, if I was you, to that fash about grouse. It's all a fashion. Nobody ever thou of grouse in my young days, and coming after they eat everything as they can set their face to. Wh should they want with it? I've brought you the lemon Many a man wouldn't be seen carrying a bag o' lemons all the way up the hill; and everything's kep' from me, just because I'm too humble-minded, and don't make no stand, nor mind what I do."

"What's been kep' from you, Pick?" said Mrs. Purcell, pausing in her work to look at him. Then she added, "There's been a deal of talking in the study. I've picked up a word or two about some woman, for they were going on about She; and She —but whether it's that Miss Despard, or who it is, John's never said a word to me."

"It don't need a witch to tell that it's a woman," said Pick; but he was relieved. "That fellow Rowley's been at me, and one of the ladies round the corner; but they both had so much to say that I got off, and neither the one nor the other found out as I hadn't a notion what they were talking about," the old man added, with a chuckle. "It's some new voice, as far

as I can make out, as master has got hold of for the Abbey: and quite right too. Tommy Rowley's got a pretty little bit of a voice, and he's only twelve; but some voices goes sooner than others. The ladies thought as it was a woman; but that's impossible. They were quite in a way. They said it was uneck—some thin' or other—Dissenting-like, as I took it up—and that the Signor ought to be ashamed of hisself——"

"Master?" said Mrs. Purcell, opening her eyes wide; "but I hope you didn't stand there and hear them say any harm of the Signor?"

"They told me as I was to give him good advice," said Pick, still chuckling; "but all the same, ma'am, I don't think as Mr. John should keep a thing from his mother. Where's the young man as owes as much to his mother as that young man owes to you?"

"Not to me, to his own deservings; he's been a lad that has done credit to everyone as has been kind to him, Pick, and never forgets nobody as has been kind to him; but he's not the young man he was. He's lost all his smiles and his fun since he had that disappointment. I don't wish Miss Despard no harm, but I wish she had been a hundred miles from here, and my John had never seen her. Young women have a great deal to answer for," said Mrs. Purcell, with a sigh.

"Young women *haven't* much to answer for, so far as *I'm concerned; nor master* neither, so far as I can

see," said Pick, going off to his work with a comfortable consciousness that, this being the case, it did not matter so much about Mr. John.

But, if the community was thus stirred in general, words cannot tell the excitement that this strange incident created in the organ-loft. The Signor told Purcell after, that he could not tell what it was that made him go on when he had come to an end of the "Pastoral Symphony," and play "There were Shepherds." He had not meant to do it. He had intended to make the other the finale of his performance. There was such a feeling of night in it, the Signor said, the grass growing in the dark, and the stars shining, and the dew coming down. He meant to end there; he knew Mr. Ridsdale was a modern man and an opera man, and did not care so very much for Handel. Still he had meant to end with that; but when it came to the last chords he was not his own master, and he went on. As for Purcell, there was no need for anyone to tell him whose that voice was. Though he was at the moment helping to "blow," he nearly compromised the whole performance by darting to the other side of the organ-loft and gazing down into the darkness to see her. Happily the other man who was there, the professional blower, was taken by no such vagaries and kept on steadily. "And I saw her," Purcell said, "standing in the moonlight with all the colours of the rainbow about her, like the nimbus round the heads in

layton's new window." The young fellow was struck by this sight. He thought it must mean hing: he thought even she must be relenting to- himself, and had taken this strange way of ng it. The Signor was greatly moved too, but d not take that view of the subject. He was a rtist himself, and he knew that there are impulses get the better of people who are of this race. atted his assistant on the arm, and told him not ild on it. But what then could it mean? young ll said; and it was difficult to answer. They both m came down from their lofty gallery afterwards at excitement, and the Signor, confused, received nthusiastic thanks of his audience. "What a re you have given us!" they said; "you have better than your word. What exquisite playing, what an exquisite voice! You don't mean to say was a boy, Signor?"—They asked the question, ey all believed, of course, that it was a boy. To that little Rowley, because it was dark and nobody im, should have been able to sing like that! No suspected the truth except Rollo Ridsdale, who up to the musician in the dark nave and gripped y the arm, so that he hurt the sensitive Italian- shman, whose nerves were all on the surface. you do it on purpose?" Rollo cried, excited "I shall *give up the* opera and take to oratorios *you do it on purpose?*" "Did *you* do it on

purpose?" said the Signor, who up to this moment had supposed in his excitement that Ridsdale's coming must have had something to do with it. But after that question, which Rollo did not distinctly hear, the Signor changed his tone and hid his own astonishment, and accepted the applauses addressed to him on the admirable device by which he had given his hearers a double pleasure. And Purcell and he went home with their heads full of a hundred conjectures. Who had brought her in? how did she know of it even? Old Wykeham had kept his own counsel—he did not know whether he might not be supposed to have taken too much upon him had it been known; and, though he heard the two musicians talking of this miracle, he threw no light upon it, which he might have done so easily. Who could have told her? who could have brought her in? Purcell could not but think that her coming was a sign of relenting, that she was thus making a kind of celestial intimation that all was not over. This raised him into a very ecstasy of hope.

The Signor had other thoughts. He thought of nothing else all night; the sympathy and comprehension of an artist filling his mind and driving away the almost dislike with which, after her rejection of his *protégé*, he had been disposed to regard Lottie. Whatever might happen to Purcell, here was something which had never happened to himself in his life before. No doubt it had been a sudden impulse, like

that which had made her fly trembling and pale with excitement, from himself and them all, in the drawing-room of the Deanery. This time the impulse had been the other way, and she had obeyed it. He had subjugated her by waiting her time, and, by what was much more pleasant to think of, the spell of his music, which had gone to her heart. Let it not be supposed that any sentiment about Lottie had begun to creep into the Signor's heart. Young women, as Pick said, had little to answer for as far as he was concerned. He was all artist and not much else; but, with a glow through his being which answered, let us suppose, to the high throb of satisfaction which goes through persons who talk about their hearts, he said to himself, "She shall not escape me this time!" He knew more of Lottie than Rollo Ridsdale did. And he knew that he could make more of her than Rollo could make of her. He could make of her much more than was dreamed of in Rollo's philosophy. He knew what she needed, and he could give it to her. In his hands, the Signor thought, this simple English girl might rise to the level of the Malibrans, of the Pastas. There should be no one able to stand before her.

It is to be feared he was thinking of this more than of the music as he played through King in F, which was the service for that morning. And he left Purcell to play *the voluntary* and stole out unobserved, *though it was indecorous,* before the congregation had

dispersed. He threaded through the dim aisles and the cloisters, before Wykeham had time to call attention to him by hobbling after him with his jangling keys. He, like Lottie, had resolved to give himself no time to think of it, to do it at once. Ridsdale!—What a vain fool he was, talking about giving up opera and taking to oratorios! What could he do with her, if he had got her? His manager had rejected Lottie, and gone off after that voice at Milan. What fools they all were! and what would be the advantage to Ridsdale of having this voice untrained on his hands? What could he do with her? but there was nothing she might not do under the guidance of the Signor.

It was still early when he reached the little house: Lottie had not attempted to go out this morning to see the Signor, she was too much shaken by her escapade of last night. How could she have done it? She, who had loathed the idea of becoming a singer! She had made a singer of herself by her own act and deed, and she felt the full meaning of what she had done. She had got up early, unable in her excitement to sleep, and tingling still with the consequences of this strange, unpremeditated, unintended self-betrayal. What was it that had made her do it? She had got her work, and she had placed herself near the window —not so near as to be seen, yet near enough to be able to glance out and see anyone who might be coming that way. There were things to be done in

the house, domestic operations of more importance than the needlework. But Lottie said to herself that they could wait—oh, they could wait! In the meantime what was best was, that she should be ready in case anyone called, ready to see anybody that might come over the road across the sunshine, in the morning quiet. "Good night; but only till to-morrow"—what was it that had conveyed to her the consciousness that he was there? The Abbey had been dark—she had not been thinking of him—certainly she had not known that he was looked for; and yet, what but the sense that he was there would have made her do what she had done? She had sung unwillingly, unwittingly, in spite of herself, because he was there. It all seemed quite plain to Lottie. He it was (she thought) who had first made her aware that this gift of hers was anything worth thinking of; he it was who had first given her the supreme pleasure of consciousness, who had shown to her the happiness she could bestow. Her voice (as she thought), if after all it was really worth anything, if it was the thing he thought it, the thing it sounded like last night—belonged to him. It was his spiritually; he had discovered it, and revealed it to herself. She had not been aware what she was doing; but unconsciously it was to him she was singing, when her voice escaped from her: it was a welcome *to him—and* he had accepted it as his welcome. *Lottie gave a glance* from her window, and

thought she saw some one coming across the broad sunshine in the Dean's Walk. Her heart gave a louder beat—*he* was coming. She made no mystery now about it; the preliminaries were all over. He came for her—who else? he had never concealed it; he had come for her long ago. She could not tell how long ago it was since he had first caught a glimpse of her at the window. Always since then it had been for her that he came: content at first to watch outside her window; then, with a lover's ingenuity, finding out ways of meeting her; then venturing, bold yet timid, always reverential, to her home—and now at length what was coming? He was coming. And she had withdrawn the veil from her heart, and seen and acknowledged what was there. It was for him she sang: without knowing it, her heart had been aware of his presence; and now he was coming. Lottie drew back in the shade of the great leaves which garlanded h window. The next moment he would be here——

But it was only the Signor.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE FOOL'S PARADISE.

THE Signor came in with some suppressed excitement about him, which he concealed under an air of perfect calm, but which betrayed itself in the gleam of his eyes and the rapidity of his movements. He saw in a moment that he had bitterly disappointed Lottie, whose countenance changed as she saw him—changed from glowing expectation to that sudden pallor and sickness of departing hope which seems to carry all the life out of a face. He saw it, and he understood; he had the quickness of perception which belonged to his Italian origin, and he had, as we have said, a great deal that was feminine in him—this among the rest, that he could divine and read the meanings of a face. He saw at once what it was. She had expected, not him, but another. The Signor was very sorry for Lottie. He had been angry, almost spitefully angry, about her rejection of his favourite pupil; but she had made her peace with him last night, and all her offences had been condoned. He was very sorry for her. She had been looking for *Ridsdale*, and Ridsdale had not come. *The Signor felt that he himself* was a much safer and

better visitor for her; but, all the same, he was sorry for Lottie. He bowed with a depth of respect, which, indeed, he showed to all ladies. He was more of an Italian than an Englishman in this point; he was always ceremonious and stately to women, bowing to the ground, taking the hand offered to him reverentially, as if he meant to kiss it. This ceremony gave Lottie a little time to recover herself, and after all it was very early. The voluntary was still sounding from the Abbey (how had the Signor got away so soon?), and though *he* had not appeared yet, that was not to say that he was not coming. She took her seat again, with the colour coming back.

"I do not know how to speak to you," he said; "how to thank you for last night——"

"Oh! so long as you do not think me very presumptuous—very bold. I—could not help it. It was the music that went to my head," said Lottie, very tremulous, giving a hasty glance at him and then turning her head away.

"It is just because the music goes to your head that I have such high hopes—Miss Despard," said the Signor; "let bygones be bygones, won't you? and let us be friends."

"We never quarrelled that I know of," said Lottie, slightly alarmed; and, for his part, the Signor was confused, thinking of Purcell, of whose misadventure he had, of course, no right to know.

You were not pleased with me," he said. "I did
orship your voice as some people do. I told you
ly that you wanted instruction. So you do still.
voice is lovely, Miss Despard, and you have the
of an artist. You can forget yourself. Little
rs never forget themselves; they are always in the
round, seeing their own personality everywhere;
: is very different with you."

ottie did not say anything in reply. She felt
ly that he was giving her praise, but she did not
. Was that someone coming in below? but it was
Captain Despard returning in after matins. The
r, always so quick, felt again the flutter in her,
new what her expectation was.

You were once very angry with me for making a
application to you. You thought I meant to be
spectful? Ah, no. I could not fail of respect to
y, Miss Despard; but I saw in you what I see still
clearly now."

Signor!" said Lottie, rousing herself up to seize
pportunity, with a bewildered feeling that it was
to do it, that if she did not do it now, she never
t; and, finally, that to do it might propitiate fate
make it unnecessary to be done—"Signor—let me
you first. I went to the Abbey yesterday on pur-
to see you, to say to you——ah, here is some
coming *to interrupt us.*"

*Yes, there is some* one coming to interrupt us,"

cried the Signor almost bitterly; this time there be no doubt who it was; "but first, one word he comes. You were coming to tell me that you sented—that you would be my pupil?"

She could scarcely pay any attention to him saw. What a thing to think of, that a girl like th woman with genius, should let an empty-headed comb come between her and all that was worth ca for, between her and Art! She gave him a confus half-guilty look, which seemed like a confession weakness, and nodded only in reply. Nodded! wh a proposal was made to her such as the Muse mig have made to her chief favourite, when the gates c the Palace of Art were being rolled open wide to ad mit her. In that moment, Lottie, all pre-occupied by the advent of a mere man of fashion, in music not more than a charlatan, in honour not much to brag of, gave her consent to the arrangement which was to fashion her life by—a nod. Heaven and earth! what a demonstration of female folly! Could the Signor be anything but vexed? He could hardly restrain his impatience, as Rollo came in, all eager and smiling, easy and cordial even to himself. The Signor, though he was as innocent of sentiment as old Pick, looked like nothing in the world so much as a scared, jealous, and despairing lover, watching, in spite of himself, the entrance of the conquering hero, for whom all the songs were sung and all the welcomes said.

"I might have known I should find Rossinetti here," l Rollo, "as he is an earlier bird than I am. Where ıld we all flock this morning but here? You have :n thanking Miss Despard for her divine singing last ht. My life, what singing it was! I have never rd anything like it. Miss Despard, I have come to ıounce to you my conversion. I abjure opera as I ure the pope. Henceforward Handel is my creed—long as you are his interpreter," he added, sinking voice.

"Yes," said the Signor. "Miss Despard will sing y well if she works; but we are far yet from the hest excellence of which such a voice as hers is ıable. I will take my leave now. Perhaps you e a friend who would bring you to my house? that ıld be the best. No doubt I could come here; but ou will come to my house, my piano is a very good , and that would be the best. Don't think it is thing to be remarked; my pupils constantly do it. ey bring a maid with them, or, if it is needful, I d for Mrs. ——, for my housekeeper. My young ies are most unflatteringly at their ease with me."

"You are going to take lessons?" Rollo asked ckly. "I congratulate you, Rossinetti. My good ow, you are a great genius, and I know very little, I never was so envious of you before. All the ıe *you know lessons are*—teaching is—well, we *t admit, not much* more than a pretence in the

present case. The habit of singing, that is all Miss Despard wants."

"You must pardon me that I don't agree with you," the Signor said, somewhat stiffly. "Miss Despard does not want flattery from me. She will get plenty of that by and by; but she does want teaching, *senza complimenti*, and that she shall have if she will take it. It rests with her whether or not she will take it. If she does take it as I would have her do—then," said the Signor, with a gleam in his eyes of suppressed enthusiasm, "then I flatter myself——"

Rollo was provoked. Though he was very sweet-tempered, he did not like to be crowed over in this way, and his pleasant hyperbole flattened out; besides, there is something in the presence of a young woman which makes men, ever so slightly pitted against each other, pugnacious. He laughed. "I see," he said, "you won't flatter Miss Despard, Rossinetti, but you flatter yourself."

"I will send you word about hours," said the Signor hastily. "I beg your pardon, I did not quite catch your last observation. Good morning, Miss Despard. To-morrow or after to-morrow I shall hope to begin."

"Good-bye, for the moment; we shall meet later," said Rollo, with a smile and a nod, turning to open the door for his—not rival certainly, but competitor. He opened the door and closed it behind the Signor with quite unnecessary attention, his face full of sup-

essed laughter and malicious satisfaction. Rollo felt at he remained master of the field. He came back where Lottie, agitated and happy, was sitting, rubng his hands with triumph. "The Signor is an exllent musician, but he is a prig, Miss Despard, if ou will permit the word; and now that we have got d of him," said Rollo, dropping into that other seat side her, "let me say——"

What did he say? Lottie remembered most of the ords for years and years. When she heard the sound f them again in other conversations, in sentences at had no relation to her, from other people, and en addressed to other people, she would hold her eath. Foolish girl! they were well-worn words, such perhaps every woman possessing such a gift, or en a much smaller gift than Lottie's, has heard to eariness; but the most common approbation, which terwards becomes the mere accompaniment and petty urmur of existence, one time in one's life is divine -as he told her her voice was, as he let her infer e too was, and everything about her. Lottie was ot used to anything like flattery. Even in the best circumstances, fathers and brothers are seldom enusiastic; and kind Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, though she ad given her countenance to Rowley's lessons, did ot in the least conceal that she was bored by them; nd the *tenor was a great* deal too much occupied *th his own voice, and* the compliments that had

been paid to him, to leave him much time for complimenting his pupil. It was true that the Signor's wish to teach her was of itself the essence of flattery; but he never had given her any credit for her singing, and always had seen the faults of it. So that it was Rollo who had first revealed to her that heaven of praise which is so doubly sweet to the neophyte when it is supposed to be not her excellence, but his love, which inspires it. Lottie had no defence against the enthusiasm, the admiration, the rhapsodies of her companion. If they were excessive, that was not because he was failing in truth, but only abounding in love. So she thought. The very atmosphere around her turned into happiness. Her eyes were dazzled with it. She could not look at him nor lift her face except in momentary sudden glances, so much was the air full of this suffused, subdued, but penetrating glory. And, strangely enough, though he did not feel half so much as she supposed him to feel, Rollo himself was moved by this something in the air which rayed out from her exquisite dawn of bliss and of love. He said naturally a great deal more than he intended—and, what was more wonderful, he felt a great deal more than he could have supposed possible — and without the least purpose or thought, dropped moment by moment deeper and deeper into that curious kind of rapture which is tolerably expressed by the phrase, falling in love. Reason had nothing to do with it,

r intention; and he had not come here driven by a ssion which was more strong than he was, as Lottie ught. But, nevertheless, whether it was the magnetic luence of that sentiment in her which he had called th without knowing it, and which now touched him h sympathetic life: or the more commonplace result her beauty, and of their close propinquity, and her ieliness, and the generous impulse of protection and idness that was in him: certain it is that all Lottie's as of him realised themselves in the young man's nd in the most miraculous way. He had always en, all his friends knew, ridiculously sympathetic all ; life. Never before had it taken this precise form; t then, never before had Rollo met with the same mbination of circumstances. He had flirted with a at many people, and foolish girls, who were not ident enough to remember his younger brotherhood d impecunious position, had liked his company and en very willing to roam along the first beginnings the primrose path by his side; but nothing more an the lightest exchanges of sentiment had ever me to pass. And then he had believed of several men that they were "making a set" at him, and siring to "catch" him. No degree of younger otherhood, no amount of impecuniosity, will prevent man from thinking that some woman or other is try-g to "*catch*" *him; but* never in all his life had Rollo *ie across a creature like* Lottie, simply, solemnly,

gratefully convinced that he was in love with her. Lottie had not been in love with him when she thought she found this out. But her certainty as to *his* sentiments had been absolute. And now this certainty was realising itself. It was a very different thing from the love which points directly and, as a matter of course, to the natural conclusion. He thought of nothing of the kind. He did not choose her out of all the world, as Lottie thought. But it came to very much the same thing as they sat together, talking about everything, dropping into mutual confidences, wasting the sweet autumnal morning. Lottie knew that all her domestic businesses were waiting for her, but did not care. And Rollo knew that, if he were questioned as to where he had been, he would have to invent an explanation other than the true one. But what did this matter? They sat and talked, forgetting even music, which was the one thing hitherto which had occupied them when together. He did not ask her to sing to him, which was a thing which made Lottie very happy, notwithstanding that it was his admiration of her voice only which had made her recognise and be glad of that possession. She had sung for him gladly, but now she was more pleased not to be asked to sing. What did they want with music? It would be hard to describe how well they came to know each other during that long morning's talk. He told her *about* himself, and she told him about herself, and

thus they skimmed over very dangerous ground as to the beginning of their own acquaintance. Lottie, with a girl's shrinking from premature avowal, hurried over that point lest he might perhaps tell her how he had seen her, and dreamed of her, long before he dared claim acquaintance. Poor Lottie! but for that fond delusion she might have heard the real cause of his first eagerness to make her acquaintance, and been disenchanted. But what would it have mattered? By this time, things had gone too far to make it an advantage to her now to be undeceived.

This was the beginning of the time which was the crown and flower of life to Lottie Despard. Deceived, and yet not deceived; creating really the sentiment which she believed in, yet not as she believed it: she herself all simple and trustful, impassioned in everything she undertook, then and there, to the last fibre of her being, gave her heart to Rollo Ridsdale—loved him, believing herself as fully justified as ever woman was, by the possession of his love, to bestow her own; and bestowing it purely, freely, without doubt or *arrière pensée*. His rank and the pleasure of thinking that some one out of the world above her, the world which she aspired to, and felt herself to belong to, was seeking her, had dazzled Lottie at the first;—but by this time it did not matter to her who or what Rollo was. Sometimes even, she thought that she would prefer him to be more on her own level: then

stopped and reproved herself proudly for wanting to take anything from him who deserved everything. His position as a patrician, his supposed wealth (how was Lottie to know that such a man, possessing everything, could be just as poor, and perhaps not much more honourable in respect to debt and such matters, than her father?), the grace and nobleness of all his surroundings, were part of his nature, she thought in her simplicity. To shut him up in small rooms, confine him to the limited horizon of common life, and its poor little routine of duties, would be to take something from Rollo; and she did not want to take anything from him, rather to add any honour and glory that might be wanting. She did not know how long or how short a time they had been together on that wonderful morning before they first began to talk (as Lottie said) like friends. It lasted no more than a moment, and yet it was a new life all luminous and great, throwing the twenty years of the other life which had preceded it, entirely into shade. She had to stand still to steady herself and accustom her eyes to the ordinary atmosphere when he went away. Everything was changed. Her head went round. She did not know how to go downstairs (too late, too late!) and look after the household matters that she had postponed; and when she did go to them she went hazily like one in a dream. What a change come upon life! Yesterday, even Rollo was

han a distant vision of possibilities to her; now she eemed to know him thoroughly, to know all about im; to feel that she could tell him whatever might appen, that it would be natural to confide everything o him—everything! her heart threw wide open its loors. She did not think even that he might wonder o find himself so entirely received into her life. ottie had none of the experience which the most rdinary encounter with the world, which even ball-oom tattle and the foolish commerce of flirtations ive. She came to this first chapter, all innocent and riginal in heart and thought, with the frankness as ell as the timidity of a nature unalarmed and (in his kind) knowing no evil. Love was to her an angel, he first of the angels—inspiring awe, but no terror. he went to her work feeling as if she walked to some oble strain of music. Nothing could irritate her, no-hing put her out.

That evening Lottie went out upon the Slopes in he dusk to breathe the evening air and give herself hat fresher, sweeter medium for her dreams. Law as out, the Captain was out as usual; and the little ouse was very still with only Mary in the kitchen (for ost of her time hanging about the back entrance ooking for the baker), and Lottie upstairs. Somehow o-night Lottie did not wait for Captain Temple, who ad constituted *himself her* escort, but as soon as it *egan to be really evening* stole out by herself and

made her way quickly up the Dean's Walk, not anxious to join anyone. She wanted to be alone for her thoughts. It was not that the slightest idea of meeting Rollo entered into her mind—how should it? The dinners at the Deanery were not like the afternoon meal in the Chevaliers' lodges, out of which all the inhabitants streamed as soon as that was over, to get the good of the summer night. Summer—for, though it was beginning to be autumn, it was still summer—warm, soft, delicious evenings with so much dusk in them, and misty sweetness. Lottie wanted nothing at that moment of dreamy happiness but silence and her own thoughts; more, however, was in store for her. The Deanery dinner was a family dinner that evening, and while the Dean read the evening paper, and Lady Caroline put up her feet on the sofa, what was a young man to do? He said he would go over to the Signor's and talk music and smoke a cigar; and the elder people though they were fond of Rollo, were not sorry to be rid of him. He wanted, perhaps, to enjoy his triumph over the Signor, or to find out what his plans were and expectations of Lottie's voice; or, perhaps, only he wanted a little variety, feeling the company of his venerated relations too much pleasure. But, though he was not so full of dreams as Lottie, something of the same charmed mood was in his mind. And when caprice made him take the turn up to the Slopes also, instead of going the other way through the Cloisters

to the musician's house—and when the two caught sight of each other, they both started with genuine surprise, and there was on Lottie's side even a little alarm. She was too shy to beg him in so many words to go away, but it was only the want of courage which kept her from saying so. It was too much; it did not seem right to meet him again; but then Lottie reflected that to the merest acquaintance she was bound to be polite. Mr. Ridsdale had the same thought. He was unfeignedly delighted to see her, finding this way of escape from all possibility of dulness much more complete than he thought; but yet he felt that perhaps a second encounter so soon, and in a place open to all eyes, might be dangerous; notwithstanding, what could a man do? He was bound to be civil. He could not run away from a lady when he met her, simply because he admired her—a reason, on the contrary, to keep him by her side. So they took a stroll together, this way and that way, from one end to the other: it was not a very long way. He told her that he was going to the Signor's, and she accepted the explanation very demurely, notwithstanding the fact that the Signor lived on the lower side of the Deanery and this was on the upper side; and she told him that she had only just come out, having missed Captain Temple, who would appear presently:—"He is my usual companion —he is *very old, the oldest* of all the Chevaliers—and *he is very, very kind to me.*" Each accepted what the

other thus said with a kind of solemnity; and they made two turns up and down, stopping now and then to look out upon the plain so broad and blue, with the soft autumn mists hanging on the horizon. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," Rollo said; and they stood still and gazed, following the river in its silvery windings, and silent as if their minds were absorbed in these atmospheric influences and that dusky bridal of the earth and sky. When Captain Temple came up Rollo asked to be introduced to him, and was very civil. "Miss Despard has been waiting for you, and I have kept her company," he said, so that the old Captain thanked him civilly, if a little stiffly; and then the two turned their backs upon each other, Rollo hastening down to the Cloisters to keep, as he said, his appointment, and Lottie turning away without so much as a parting glance, without shaking hands. Captain Temple, alarmed at first, took heart, and thought it was nothing but politeness when he saw how they parted. "You were quite right, my dear, quite right to wait, and I am much obliged to Mr. Ridsdale; I cannot think how I missed you." Lottie did not make a direct reply, but compelled herself to talk, and very demurely, with much praise of the lovely night, went with him home.

If Captain Temple had but known! And after this *how* many meetings there were, so happily accidental, *so* easily explainable, and yet requiring no such ex-

planation! How well they began to know each other's habits and each other's likings; and how sweet were all the dewy misty paths in that fool's paradise! or on the Slopes, if you prefer it; it does not matter much about a name.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A TERRIBLE INTERRUPTION.

WHILE the time went on in this dream for L it did not stand still with the rest of the world. absorption in her own affairs, which for the mor had become complete, and withdrew her thoughts f much that had previously occupied them, was agreeable to her father and brother. Lottie had e cised no control that she was aware of upon her fat but now that her keen eyes were veiled with dre and her mind abstracted from what was going on rc her, it is inconceivable how much more free and at ease the Captain felt. He had a jauntier air than e when he walked down into the town after he released from matins; and he came in later at n Captain Despard's doings at this time were much ta of in the lodges. He had never been approved by brother Chevaliers. The old gentlemen felt that younger man, with his jauntiness and his lov pleasure, was no credit to them; and if the gossip true about his intentions, some of them thought something ought to be done. The ladies were more indignant. They were threatened in their di

iore than their husbands were. An officer was an fficer, whatever happened; but if this man, who was 1 himself so objectionable, should bring in a dress- iaker girl among them, it was the Chevaliers' wives ho would be the sufferers. The gentlemen thought aguely that something should be done; but the ladies ere for carrying it to Parliament, or to the Queen erself. Was there not some old statute forbidding a hevalier to marry? If there was not, there ought to e, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said, with a twinkle in her ye. There was nobody, indeed, so much aggrieved s Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who lived next door, and was lready intimate with the family; and though there ere times when she made a joke of it, there were lso times when she was ready to go to the Queen on ie subject.

"If there isn't a law there ought to be one!" Mrs. )'Shaughnessy declared. "What do they want with ives at their age, if they haven't got 'em already? )'ye think I'd like to hear of me Major with a second, nd me not cold in my grave?"

It was suggested that the Chevaliers should "speak )" this dangerous member of their corporation; but he old gentlemen, it was found, did not care to under- ake this. Who would do it? There was not one of hem who could use the privilege of friendship with his flighty, *dissipated fellow*, who was young at fifty *the other veterans;* and they had not the same con-

fidence in the efficacy of "speaking to" a culprit which the ladies had.

So the little world within the Precincts looked on in great perturbation, sorry for Lottie, but still more sorry for themselves, whose credit was threatened by this danger. And jauntier and jauntier grew the Captain. He wore his hat more and more over his left ear—he got a new tie, louder and brighter than any that had ever been seen in the Precincts. His new suit was of a larger stripe. Altogether, things were ripening for some new event. Something was going to happen; everybody felt it, in the air, in the heaviness of the autumn weather. Lottie's proceedings, which might otherwise have given much anxiety to the community, were veiled by the interest attaching to her father's; which, indeed, was well for Lottie, who was not at all times quite aware what she was doing, or where her steps were tending, as she walked and wandered—not in her sleep, but in her dreams.

There was another who took advantage of Lottie's abstraction, and that was Law. He had begun by going quite regularly to Mr. Ashford, "reading," as it was called, with the Minor Canon, whom he liked, and who was kind to him, and sharing the instructions which were being given to young Uxbridge, the son of the Canon. For a little while there had been gloom and consternation in this young man's home because of Law. He was not a companion for her boy, Mrs.

Uxbridge thought; but when this was suggested to the Minor Canon he smiled so grimly, and answered with such uncompromising brutality, that, of course, he could have no possible objections to young Mr. Uxbridge's removal, that the mother nearly fainted, and Mr. Uxbridge himself, a large and stately person, had to stammer forth an apology. There was a dangerous gleam in Ashford's eye, enough to appal the Chapter, notwithstanding his inferiority to them, and there was nothing for it but to let him have his way. And for a week or two Law was exemplary—he allowed that for the first time in his life he could feel he was getting on; he became what he called "thick" with Uxbridge, who took him out boating and cricketing; and so far all went well. But when Lottie's vigilance all at once relaxed—when she began to steal out herself, and come in with her eyes all dazzled and dreamy, often not knowing when she was spoken to, taking so much less heed than usual of other people's proceedings, Law's industry began to flag. Sometimes he "shirked" altogether; very often he never looked at his books, except under Mr. Ashford's eye. He made Uxbridge idle too, who was but too much disposed to take a bad example. Uxbridge had a boat of his own, and they went on the river for days together. Sometimes a cricket match ended in a dinner, to which Law would *be invited with* his friend. He got into *better company, but it* is doubtful whether this was

much to the advantage of his morals, and it certainly was not at all to the advantage of his studies. The Minor Canon remonstrated, and Lottie would now and then wake up and make an appeal to him.

"Are you working, Law? I hope you are working. Does Mr. Ashford think you are getting on?" she would say. But these were not like the energetic protests of old. And when Law answered that he was getting on pretty well, but that old Ashford didn't say much—it wasn't his way—Lottie accepted the reply, and asked no more questions. And Law accordingly took "his fling," being left free on all sides. Why shouldn't he take his fling? The others were doing it—even Lottie; did she think he was blind not to see how often that fellow Ridsdale was spooning about, and how many more walks she took than she used to? Captain Temple got tired of coming for her. Very often she had gone before he came—and would run back breathless, and so sorry to have missed him. What did all that mean if not that Lottie was taking her fling too? And his father—Captain Despard—was speeding very quickly towards such a thing as would startle the whole town, not to speak of the Abbey. It would be hard if Law were the only one to have his nose kept to the grindstone; and this, we may be sure, *was* the last thing he meant to allow.

As for Lottie, she carried on the business of her *life in* a way. The house did not suffer—the dinner

was always punctual, and the stockings mended, notwithstanding dreams. She found time, indeed, for more actual occupation than before. She went to the Signor's—Mrs. O'Shaughnessy generally, but sometimes Captain Temple, going with her when she went for her lessons—and she went to the Abbey more frequently than she had been used to do. These lessons were moments of excitement for the Signor's household. When it was the old Captain who had accompanied Miss Despard, Mrs. Purcell was had in from her room, where she sat expectant among her jam cupboards; and profound was her interest. She sat near the door hemming some dusters, while the lesson went on; but sometimes would drop her work and cross her hands, and raise her eyes to the dusky heaven of the ceiling.

"Dear, bless me!" said the housekeeper, "that was a note!" for she had learned a little about music after all her experiences. Her son rarely made his appearance at all; he would loiter about the passage and catch a glimpse of Lottie as she went in or out, and sometimes he would come in suddenly very red and agitated, to turn over the music or look for some song that was wanted. Lottie was very anxious always to be friendly to him; but though these lessons seemed to poor young Purcell the things which chiefly made life desirable, yet he was not sufficiently at his ease to make any reply to her greeting, except by a deeper blush and an embarrassed bow. And very often—so

often that the Signor had almost wound himself up to the point of remonstrating, and old Pick had been charged to say that his master was engaged, and that no one could enter—Rollo Ridsdale would stray in by accident and form one of the party. It was very strange that, though old Pick had orders so precise, yet Rollo somehow always got in. How was it?

"I don't know myself," old Pick would say, with a grin; "he's the perseveringest gentleman I ever see—and awful fond of music. It must cost him a deal," Pickering said.

Rollo strolled in sometimes at the beginning, before due precautions had been taken, sometimes near the end, when they were relaxed. He made himself very agreeable. As for Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, she was his slave, and she was quite persuaded by this time that she herself was nearly connected with the Courtland family, and that Rollo's uncle—or was it a cousin?—had been not only the Major's but her own dearest friend. Captain Temple, when he was the chaperon, was more suspicious; but, notwithstanding his objection to young men, and especially to Honourables, in connection with young women, Rollo ended by making the old Chevalier his friend. He had the gift of disarming prejudice—being kind himself by nature, and of a friendly disposition, such as makes friends. And Rollo was very careful under the eyes of all these keen observers. He confined himself to music. He looked

unutterable things; but he did not speak the applause, that was implied in his looks. He said only, "I must not say anything, Miss Despard—I dare not, for Rossinetti; but I think the more."

Lottie did not want him to applaud her. It was enough for her that he heard her; but it was only when he was there that she did herself full justice. And it is not to be supposed that the Signor was ignorant of the changed tone in her voice which showed when he appeared. It was too great a vexation to him to be ignored. Art, pure art, was not as yet, if it ever would be, the spring of Lottie's life. It was "that fellow." Her voice grew softer and more exquisite, full of pathos and meaning—her notes more liquid and sweet. If the Signor had been Rollo's rival in reality he could scarcely have been more annoyed —he whose aspiration was to make a true artist of this creature, to whom heaven had given so glorious a medium of expression, but who as yet knew nothing about art.

Thus September stole away. Never before had Ridsdale been so long at the Deanery. He gave sometimes one reason and sometimes another for his delay. It was very convenient for him, as the place was central, and he was often obliged to run up to town to see after business connected with the Opera. His company meant to open their house in spring; and the manager being in Italy, there was a great deal to do

which fell upon Rollo. He had invitations without number, but he neglected them all. So long as his aunt would have him there was no place so convenient for him as the Deanery. And Lady Caroline was very willing to have him. She had always been kind to him. If her feelings had been strong enough to justify anyone in considering himself her favourite, then Rollo might have done so. She had always been kind; and a habit of kindness is as good as any other habit, and is the best pledge of continuance. And she liked in a way to have him there. He never gave her any trouble—now and then he succeeded in something that was very like amusing her. And he no longer demanded of her that she should invite Miss Despard daily, or trouble herself with the other people who sang. Two or three times only during the month did he ask for an invitation for the girl in whose voice he was so much interested. And he was very domestic —triumphantly disproving all the stories that had been told of him. He never cared to dine anywhere but at home while he was at the Deanery—he did not care for company. He was a very nice companion for the Dean at dinner, and after dinner he would stroll out and smoke a cigar. If he gave trouble at Courtland it was only, Lady Caroline thought with gentle complacency, because they did not know how to manage *him;* for anyone more happy to be quiet she never *saw.* And thus September passed; the partridges did

not tempt him away, any more than the grouse had done. He did not care, he declared, about sport of any kind. Music and books, and his stroll of an evening on the Slopes to smoke his cigar—these were all the virtuous amusements Rollo desired—with these he was as happy as the day was long. And in October, Augusta, coming home from her bridal tour, was to visit her mother, and there would be a little society once more at the Deanery. It came to be understood that Rollo would stay for this. It would be something to make amends to him for the quiet of the past.

October began: it was a beautiful autumn; the trees on the Slopes were all red and yellow, like painted trees, and the face of the country brilliant with sunshine. Everything was smooth and fair without and within, so far as appearances went; and, had there been no results to follow, little exception could have been taken to the proceedings of the persons concerned in this history, who were each and all following their own pleasure and doing what seemed good in their own eyes. The Captain was perhaps the most safe and most virtuous of the whole, seeing that there was no reason why he should not marry Polly if he desired very much to do so, except that it would make his children uncomfortable and disturb the equanimity of his brother Chevaliers and their belongings. But he was *in no* way bound to consider the *dignity of his brethren* in the order, neither was he

required by any law to sacrifice his own comfort for that of his son and daughter—both of them quite capable of taking thought for themselves. He may, therefore, be left out of the question; for, whether for good or evil, he was doing nothing more than he had a right to do. But in the case of the others: how pleasant would this episode of life have been had there been no consequences to follow! It was a most charming episode in the experience of Rollo Ridsdale. He was not a vicious man, but yet he had never been so virtuous, so free of evil, in all his consciousness before—his chief companion a perfectly pure-minded girl, his chief occupation to explore and study her fresh young heart and imagination, and vigorous intelligent nature. If only it could all go on to some as perfect conclusion, there could be no doubt that it was good for the speculative man of fashion. It restored him, body and soul,—regular hours, quiet, all the most luxurious comforts of life, and the delight and exhilaration of a romance to amuse the mental and sentimental side of him. The cleverest doctor that ever existed could not have recommended a more admirably curative process—if only there had been no responsibilities involved and nothing painful to follow. And Law—if Law had only had the prospect of a small estate, a small inheritance at the end, enough to live on, what a perfectly pleasant "time" he was having! He was doing no harm, only boating, cricketing, be-

ginning now as the season went on to think of football—none of them wicked pursuits: if only there had been no examinations to think of, no work of life to prepare for. Lottie was the least to blame of the three; the consequences did not trouble her. She might perhaps be allowing herself to be absorbed too much by the new and wonderful influence which had taken possession of her: the *vita nuova* might have become too entirely the law of her being; but well or ill she still did her duty, and her realisation of the result was perfectly simple. What but one thing could all this lead to? No doubt invaded Lottie's inexperienced mind; how could she doubt that Rollo loved her? What proof was wanting that man could give? They had not yet spoken of that love, though they had several times approached to the very verge of an explanation, from which generally it was she who shrank with a shy prolonging of that delicious uncertainty which was no uncertainty at all. How could Lottie have any doubt? It was not necessary even for her to say to herself that he was good and true. True!—she no more thought of falsehood than Eve had thought of the serpent before he hissed his first question into her ear. She did not understand what lying meant, practical lying of this kind. She let the sweet current sweep her on with many a heart-beat; but why should she be distrustful *of it? What* could love lead to but happiness? *Lottie could not* think of anything more.

And thus the time went on. Augusta Huntington (Mrs. Daventry) was coming home with her husband in a day or two; and though Lottie thought she would be glad to see her old friend, she had a little secret fear of anything now happening. All was very well as it was. To meet Rollo accidentally as he smoked his cigar on the Slopes would not be so easy if his cousin were at the Deanery. He would not be able to get out so easily, and probably she would find a great many new ways of employing him which would take him out of Lottie's way. She did not like to look forward to it; and after Augusta's visit Rollo too would go away. It would be almost winter, and he could not stop any longer. All the shooting and the deerstalking and the round of visits to great people, on which he ought to be going, he had given up for her. What could the reason be but for her? The thought that this moment of happiness was approaching an end, was sad to Lottie, even though it should, as was natural, be followed by greater happiness still. How her dull life had flowered and blossomed out, made beautiful by the thought that he was near her, this man who loved her—who had loved her long before she had loved him, but whom now she too—! He was near, she remembered every morning when she woke; some time in the day she would be sure to see him—nay, half a dozen times in the day, if only strolling down the Dean's Walk looking at her window,

and in the Abbey, and perhaps, while she took her lesson, listening to her with soft eyes; perhaps walking home with her; perhaps just turning round that old elm-tree on the Slopes as she came out for her evening walk; always looking for her so eagerly, seeking her, with a hundred little tender cares, and something in his eyes which was more than all. Could it be possible to be happier than now? She was keeping off the *éclaircissement* with delicious shy malice, running away from it, prolonging a little longer, and a little longer, this happy uncertainty. Some time, however, it must come, and then no doubt she would be more happy—though not with such happiness as this.

On one of those lovely russet-coloured afternoons, full of haze made golden by the sunshine, already turning to the west, Lottie, walking up St. Michael's Hill, towards the Abbey, had seen a fly driving along the street which had caught her eye as she passed. She knew it very well; it was Jobling's fly—a nice respectable clean cab, looking for all the world like a shabby well-dressed man in a frock coat and high hat. There are many shabby respectable well-preserved things which resemble each other. The reason why this neat and clean vehicle caught her eye was that the man who was driving it wore a white wedding-favour, *which is a thing* which no person of twenty *can see without* remark. Lottie, like others of her

age, was half amused, half interested, and could not help wondering who it was. It was going to the railway, and some one looked out hastily as Lottie passed, looking at her, the girl thought, withdrawing as hastily again when she was seen to turn her eyes that way. Who could it be? Lottie thought she would ask Law, who knew all the news, who had been married; but she had forgotten all about it long before she saw Law. She had too many things to think of and to do, to remember so small a matter as that; and Law did not come in till late. When he did come they took their simple supper together amicably, not saying much; but she forgot the question. Now that Lottie did not bully him they were very good friends. They said a few friendly words to each other, and that was all, and then they bade each other good night. They were all alone, the Captain having left home for a few days, and had a very good opportunity for talk. But Lottie did not seize the opportunity to put disagreeable questions. She was altogether so much more amicable than she had been used to be.

Three days after, Captain Despard was to come home. It did not disturb Lottie that Captain Temple questioned her very closely as to where her father had gone. "Was he alone, do you know?" the old man said. "Alone? Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Lottie. What did it matter? She could see Rollo behind the

old beech-tree. Of course it was a drawback that the Captain should be with her so often, but it pleased the kind old man; they met and they had their little talk, which perhaps was all the more unlike the common intercourse of earth that worlds of meaning had to be trusted to a tone, to a sudden meeting in the dusk (when you could see nobody, Captain Temple said) of two pairs of eyes: and when all is unutterable is not this as good a way of utterance as any? And then Lottie said she must go home. Papa was coming home. He had been gone three days. As they went back the old Captain was more and more kind to Lottie. He kept her at the door for a moment with her hand between his two old kind hands. "My dear, don't be afraid to send for me or to come to me when you want anything—my wife and I will always be ready to be of use to you. You will not forget, Lottie?" "Oh, no, Captain Temple," she said; "you are always so kind to me; how could I forget?" And she went in smiling to herself, wondering what he could think she would want. But he was always kind, as kind as a father; far, far kinder than her own father, she could not but remember, with a little shrug of her shoulders. Had papa come in? Mary said "No," and Lottie went into the little dining-room to see that the supper was prettily arranged. There was nothing more than cold meat, and cheese, and bread and butter; but the bouquet in the middle, which was

made up of brilliantly-coloured leaves, was pretty; and the white tablecloth and the plates and glasses looked bright. In her happiness she began to sing softly as she pulled the leaves into a prettier form in the long clear glass they were grouped in. The lamp was lighted, the table was bright, the door stood open. Lottie, through her singing, heard steps coming up the pavement outside, and voices. All of a sudden she paused, thinking she heard her father's voice. Who could he be bringing with him, without any preparation? She cast a hasty glance at the beef, and saw with satisfaction that there would be enough for a stranger; enough, but not perhaps too much—he might have let her know. Then she heard his voice quite close to the window, which was open, for the night was warm for October—"Look in, and you will see her," he said. "Oh, I know her very well," said another voice, with a laugh. Lottie turned round, with her heart beating, towards the window, where something white was visible. What could it mean? —was it a woman?—*a woman* with her father at this hour of the evening? She grew pale, she could not tell why, and gazed first at the window, then at the door, with a flutter of tears which she could not understand. How foolish it was! "Come in—this way—— *don't* be afraid! The passage is narrow and the *house* is small, but there is plenty of room for happiness when once you are in it," said her father's

voice in the doorway, coming through the little crooked hall. Then the door was pushed wide open, and he came in leading some one by the hand. It was a woman very gaily dressed, with a mountain of brown hair and a white bonnet perched upon it, who laughed, but was nervous too; upon whom Lottie gazed with wondering eyes and blanched cheeks. Who was this whom he was bringing in without warning, without notice? The Captain was very jaunty; his hat was still on his head over his left ear. He had a bunch of violets somewhat crushed in his coat. He smiled a smile which was rather ghastly as Lottie gazed, struck dumb with the horror of what was coming. "Mrs. Despard," he said with a flourish, "let me present you with a ready-made daughter. Lottie, my child, come here and welcome your new mamma."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.

LOTTIE could do nothing but stand bewildered and gaze at this new claimant of her regard. Surprise took all the meaning, all the intelligence out of her face. She stood with her eyes wide open, her lips dropping apart. Her new mamma! She had the indescribable misfortune of not being able to think upon her own mother with any reverence or profound affection. Mrs. Despard was but "poor mamma" to her—no more. Lottie could not shut her eyes to the deficiencies of that poor woman, of whom the best that could be said was that she was dead, and beyond the reach of blame. There was no cherished and vaunted idea, therefore, to be outraged; but perhaps all the more Lottie's soul rose up in rebellion against the title as applied to anyone else. She had known what was coming, and yet she was as entirely taken by surprise as if this idea had never been suggested to her. With eyes suddenly cleared out of all the dazzling that had clouded them, she looked at the woman thus brought in upon her—this intruder, who, however, had more right to be there than even Lottie had—the Captain's

fe. If this event had happened a month or two ago, ile she retained all her natural vigour, no doubt, ılish as it was, Lottie would have made some show resistance. She would have protested against the lden arrival. She would have withdrawn from comny so undesirable. She would have tried, however surd it might have been, to vindicate herself, to hold : new-comer at arm's length. But this had all beme impossible now. At no other moment could she ve been so entirely taken by surprise. All the apehensions about her father which had been comınicated to her on former occasions had died out her mind. She had never said very much about s danger, or been alarmed by it, as Law was. It d not occurred to her to inquire how it would affect rself. And now she was taken altogether by surise. She stood struck dumb with amazement, and zed at the woman, instinctively taking in every parular of her appearance, as only a woman could do. ıconsciously to herself, Lottie appraised the other, w through her, calculating the meaning of her and her finery. No man could have done it, and she s not herself aware of having done it; but Polly ew very well what that look meant. Notwithstanding r own confidence in her bridal array, even Polly felt coming to pieces, felt it being set down for what it s worth; *and, naturally,* the feeling that this was so *de her angry and defiant.*

"How do you do, miss?" she said, feeling that even her voice sounded more vulgar than it need have done. "I hope as we shall be good friends. Your pa has played you a nice trick, hasn't he? But men is men, and when they're like he is there's allowances to be made for them." Polly was aware that this speech was in her very worst style. She had not intended to call Lottie Miss; but with that girl standing staring, in a plain cotton frock, looking a lady, every inch of her, from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot—a bride, in a fine bonnet covered with orange-blossoms, and a bright silk dress that matched, was not in possession of her faculties. Bold as she was, she could not but be conscious of a tremor which mingled with her very defiance. "Well, I'm sure, what a pretty table!" she resumed. "They might have known we were coming home, Captain. There ain't much on it, perhaps—not like the nice chicken and sausages you'd have got at mother's. But mother would never have set it out so pretty, that I'll allow." Then Polly looked round upon the dim old walls, faintly lighted by the lamp. "So this is the dining-room," she said; "this i my new 'ome. To think I never should have bee inside the door till now! Let me alone, Harry. don't want none of your huggings. I want to ma acquaintance with my new 'ome. You know w enough I married just as much for the sake of liv in the Lodges as for you—don't you, now?" she

with a laugh. Perhaps only fathers and mothers, and not even these long-suffering persons always, can look on at the endearments of newly-married couples with tolerance. Lottie was offended, as if their endearments had been insulting to herself. She looked at them with an annoyed contempt. No sympathetic touch of fellow-feeling moved her. To compare this, as she thought, hideous travesty of love with her own, would have but hardened her the more against them. She turned away, and shut the window, and drew down the blind with an energy uncalled for by such simple duties. When the Captain led his wife upstairs, that she might take off her bonnet, Lottie sat down and tried to think. But she could not think. It had all happened in a moment, and her mind was in an angry confusion, not capable of reason. She could not realise what had happened, or what was going to happen—an indignant sense of being intruded upon, of having to receive and be civil to an unwelcome visitor, and an impatience almost beyond bearing of this strait into which her father had plunged her, filled her mind. Something more, she dimly felt, lay behind—something more important, more serious; but in the meantime she did not feel that her occupation was gone, or her kingdom taken from her. A disagreeable person to entertain—a most unwelcome, uncongenial guest. For the moment she could not *realise anything* more. But her mind was *in the most painful* ferment, her heart beating

How was she to behave to this new, strange visitor? What was she to say to her? She must sit down at table with her, she supposed. She was Captain Despard's—guest. What more? But Lottie knew very well she was something more.

Mary came in, bringing tea, which she placed at the head of the table, where Lottie usually sat. Mary's eyes were dancing in her head with curiosity and excitement. "What is it, miss? oh, what is it, miss? What's happened?" said Mary. But Lottie made her no reply. She did not herself know what had happened. She waited for the return of "the woman" with a troubled mind. Everything was ready, and Lottie stood by ready to take her seat the moment they should come back. She heard them come downstairs, laughing and talking. The woman's voice filled all the house. It flowed on in a constant stream, loud enough to be heard in the kitchen, where Mary was listening with all her ears. "Very nice on the whole," the new-comer was saying; "but of course I shall make a few changes. I've always heard that a room should be like its mistress. There's not half enough pretty things to please me. I do love a pretty room, and plenty of antimacassars and pink ribbons. Oh, I shan't tell *you* what I am going to do to it!—not a word. Gentlemen must be taught their place. I am going to make it look very nice, and that should be enough for you. Oh yes, I am quite ready for supper. I haven't

touched a bit of anything since five o'clock, when we had tea. Poor Harry! I can see how you have been put upon." This was said at the foot of the stairs, where not only Lottie but Mary could hear every word. Mary understood it all, but Lottie did not understand it. She could not receive Polly's programme into her mind, nor think what was meant by it. While she still stood waiting, the two came in—the bride, with her tower of hair upon her head, and all her cheap ribbons and bangles. She came in, drawing herself away from the Captain's encircling arm. "Behave!" said Polly, shaking a finger at him; and she swept in and round the table, almost pushing against the surprised spectator who stood looking on, and deposited herself in Lottie's chair. "It's best to begin as you mean to end," said Polly; "I'm not tired to speak of, and I'll take my own place at once. You can sit here, Miss Lottie, between him and me."

Still, Lottie did not know what to think or to say. She stood still, bewildered, and then took the place pointed out to her. What did it mean? It was easy enough to see what it meant, if her head had not been so confused. "Yes, dear," said Polly, "a little bit of cold beef—just a very little bit. I am not fond of cold victuals. That's not how we've been living, is it? and that's not how I mean you to live. Oh, no, I don't blame *Lottie. Unmarried* girls don't know any *better. They don't study* a man like his wife knows

how to do. I can see how it's been; oh, I can see! Too many mouths to feed, and the meat has to be bought according. Who is your butcher, miss? Oh, *him!* I don't hold with him. I shall send for Jones to-morrow; he's the man for my money. Wasn't that a lovely sweetbread that we had at our wedding breakfast? You didn't remark? Oh, nonsense, I'm sure you remarked! It *was* a beauty! Well, that was from Jones's. I'll send for him to-morrow. Do you take sugar in your tea, Miss Lottie? Dear! I shouldn't have thought it; so careful a young lady. 'Enery, darling, what are you drinking? Do you take tea?"

"I don't mind what I take, my love, so long as you give it me," said the gallant Captain; "tea or poison, I'd take it from that hand; and I don't want anything but to look at you at the head of my table. This is how it should be. To think how long I have been denying myself, forgetting what happiness was!"

"You poor dear Harry! all for the sake of your children! Well, I hope you'll find it repaid. They ought to be grateful. The times and times that you and me has talked it over, and given it up for their sakes! You're very quiet, miss; you don't say much," added Polly; "but I dare say it was a surprise to you seeing me come home?"

"Why don't you speak up and make yourself pleasant?" said the Captain, with a kind of growl, under his breath.

Lottie came to herself a little by dint of this pres-
. She did not seem to know how it had come
ut, or what the emergency meant. "I beg your
lon," she said, her head swimming and everything
g round with her, "I am—taken very much by
rise. If I had known what was going to happen I
ight have been more prepared."

"I can understand that," said Polly. "Hold your
ue, Captain. She is quite right. You ought to
written and told her, as I asked you. But now
you do know I hope you mean to be friendly,
. Them that treats me well, I treats them well.
on't wonder that you don't like it at first," she
ed graciously; "a girl no older than yourself! But
would have it, you know, and what could I do?
n a man's in that way, it's no use talking to him.
sisted as long as I could, but I had to give in at
last."

"By George!" said the Captain, helping the beef.
had some one to stand by him now, who he felt
ht be a match for Lottie; but he was still a little
id of Lottie, and consequently eager to crow over
in the strength of his backer. "The trouble I've
to bring matters to this point!" he said. "But
r mind, my love, it is all right now you are here.
one time I thought it never was going to be ac-
plished. But *perseverance*——"

"Perseverance does a deal; but, bless you, I never had no doubt on the subject," said the new Mrs. Despard, taking up her teacup in a way that was very offensive to Lottie. The Captain looked at her from the other end of the table with a kind of adoration; but nevertheless the Captain himself, with all his faults, was painfully aware of her double negatives, and thought to himself, even when he looked at her so admiringly, that he must give her a few lessons. He had never paid much attention to Lottie, and yet he could not help getting a glimpse of his new wife through Lottie's eyes.

"Where is my son?" said Polly. "Harry, darling, where is that dear Law? He won't be so much surprised, will he? He had a notion how things were going. But I've got a great deal to say to him, I can tell you. I don't approve of his goings on. There's a many things as I mean to put a stop to. Nobody shall say as I don't do my duty by your children. I shall tell him——"

"Do you know Law?" said Lottie. This gave her a little chill of horror; though indeed she remembered that Law had spoken of some one—some one about whom Lottie had not cared to inquire.

"Oh, yes, miss, I know Law." (Polly did not know *how* it was that she said Miss to Lottie. She did not

mean to do it. She did it, not in respect, but in derision; but the word came to her lips, whether she would or not.) "Law and I are old friends. Time was when I didn't feel sure—not quite sure, you know," she said, with a laugh of mingled vanity and malice, "if it was to be the father or the son; but, Lord, there's no comparison," she added hastily, seeing that even on the Captain's fine countenance this boast produced a momentary cloud. "Law will never be as fine a man as his father. He hasn't got the Captain's carriage, nor he ain't so handsome. Bless us, are you listening, Harry? I didn't mean you to hear. I don't think you handsome a bit, now, do I? I'm sure I've told you times and times——"

The two thus exchanging glances and pretty speeches across the table were too much occupied with themselves to think of anything else. And no one heard Law's approach till he pushed open the door, and with a "Hillo!" of absolute amazement, stood thunderstruck, gazing upon this astonishing spectacle. The sight that Law beheld was not a disagreeable sight in itself: the table, all bright with its bouquet of crimson leaves, which the Captain had pushed to one side in order that he might see his wife—and the three faces round it, two of them beaming with triumph and satisfaction. The young man stood at the door and took it all *in, with a* stare at first, of dismay.

Opposite to him sat Lottie, put out of her place, looking stunned, as if she had fallen from a height and did not know where she was. As he stood there she lifted her eyes to him with a look of wondering and bewildered misery which went to Law's heart; but the next moment he burst into a loud laugh, in spite of himself. To see the governor casting languishing looks at Polly was more than his gravity could bear. He could think of nothing, after the first shock, but "what a joke" it was. A man in love, especially a man in the first imbecility of matrimonial bliss, is a joke at any time; but when it's your governor, Law said to himself! He gave a great roar of laughter. "Polly, by Jove!" he said; "so you've been and done it!" It had alarmed him much beforehand, and no doubt it might be tragical enough after; but for the moment it was the best joke that Law had encountered for years.

"Yes, we've been and done it," said Polly, rising and holding out her hand to him. "Come here and kiss me, my son. I am delighted to see you. It's so nice to hear a good laugh, and see a bright face. Lottie, Law, hasn't found her tongue yet. She hasn't a word to throw at a dog, much less her new mamma. But you, it's a pleasure to see you. Ah!" said Polly, with effusion, "the gentlemen for me! Ladies, they're spiteful, and they're jealous, and they're stuck up; but

gentlemen does you justice. You mustn't call me Polly, however, though I forgive you the first time. You must know that I am your mamma."

Law laughed again, but it was not a pleasant laugh; and he grasped the hand which his father held out to him with a desire to crush it, if he could, which was natural enough. Law thought it a joke, it is true; but he was angry at bottom, though amused on the surface. And he did hurt his father's somewhat flabby, unworking hand. The Captain, however, would not complain. He was glad even to be met with a semblance of cordiality at such a moment. He helped Law largely to the beef, in the satisfaction of this family union, and this was a sign of anxiety which Law did not despise.

"Oh, and I assure you I mean to be a mother to you," said Polly. "It shan't be said now that you haven't anyone to look after you. *I* mean to look after you. I am not at all satisfied with some of your goings on. A gentleman shouldn't make too free with them that are beneath him. Yes, yes, Harry, darling; it's too early to begin on that point; but he shall know my mind, and *I* mean to look after him. Now this is what I call comfortable," said Mrs. Despard, looking round with a beaming smile; "quite a family *party, and quite a nice tea;* though the beef's dry to

my taste (but I never was one for cold victuals), and everybody satisfied——"

"Lottie," said the Captain, looking up from his beef with some sternness, "you seem the only exception. Don't you think, my child, when you see everybody so happy, that you might find a word to say?"

"Oh, don't hurry her," said Polly; "we've took her by surprise. I told you not to, but you would. We'll have a nice long talk to-morrow, when she gives me over the housekeeping; and when she sees as I mean to act like a mother, why things will come right between her and me."

The Despards were not highly educated people, but yet a shiver ran through them when Polly, unconscious, said, "We've took her by surprise." The Captain even shrank a little, and took a great deal too much mustard, and made himself cough; while Law, in spite of himself, laughed, looking across the table to the place where Lottie sat. Lottie noticed it the least of all. She heard every word they all said, and remembered every word, the most trifling; but at the moment she scarcely distinguished the meaning of them. She said, "I think, papa, if you don't mind, I will go to my room. I am rather tired; and perhaps *I* had better give some orders to Mary."

"Oh, never mind; never mind about Mary, if it's

n my account. I shall look after her myself," said 'olly. "What's good enough for the Captain is good nough for me; at least, till I settle it my own way, ou know. I don't want to give any trouble at all, ll I can settle things my own way."

"It is not I that have to be consulted," said 'aptain Despard; "but if you are going to sit sulky nd not say a word, I don't see—what do you think, ıy pet?—that it matters whether you go or stay——"

"Oh, don't mind me, Miss, said Polly. She could ot look Miss Despard in the face and call her Lottie, nowing, however she might consent to waive her own ights, that Miss Despard was still Miss Despard, whatver Polly might do. Not a thing on her that was 'orth five shillings, not a brooch even; nothing like a racelet; a bit of a cotton frock, no more; but she was ill Miss Despard, and unapproachable. Polly, with er bracelets on each wrist, rings twinkling on her ands as she took her supper, in a blue silk, and nowing herself to be an officer's lady—Mrs. Captain )espard—with all this, could not speak to her husand's daughter except as Miss. She could not nderstand it, but still it was so.

The little crooked hall was full of boxes when ottie came out; and Mary stood among them, wonderıg how *she was to get* them upstairs. Perhaps she

had been listening a little at the door, for Mary's consternation was as great as Lottie's. "Do you think, Miss, it's real and true? Do you think as she's married, sure? Mother wouldn't let me stay a day if there was anything wrong, and I don't know as I'll stay anyhow," Mary said.

"Wrong? what could be wrong?" said Lottie. She was less educated in knowledge of this kind than the little maid-of-all-work. It troubled her to see the boxes littering the hall, but *she* could not carry them upstairs. For a moment the impulse to do it, or, at least, to help Mary in doing it, came into her mind; but, on second thoughts, she refrained. What had she to do with this new-comer into the house, who was not even a visitor, who had come to remain? Lottie went upstairs without saying any more. She went first into the little faded drawing-room, where there was no light except that which came from the window and the lamp in the Dean's Walk. It was not beautiful. She had never had any money to decorate it, to make it what it might have been, nor pretty furniture to put into it. But she sat down on her favourite little chair, in the dark, and felt as if she had gone to sit by somebody that was dead, who had been a dear friend. How friendly and quiet the little room had been! *giving* her a centre for her life, a refuge for her *thoughts*. But all that was over. She had never

nown before that she had liked it or thought of it
ıuch; but now, all at once, what a gentle and plea-
ant shelter it had been! As Lottie thought of every-
hing, the tears came silently and bitterly into her
yes. She herself had been ungrateful, unkind to the
ttle old house, the venerable old place, the kind
eople. They had all been kind to her. She had
isited her own disappointment upon them, scorning
he neighbours because they were less stately than she
xpected them to be; visiting upon them her own dis-
ontent with her position, her own disappointment in
eing less important than she expected. Lottie was
ard upon herself, for she had not been unkind to
nyone, but was, on the contrary, a favourite with her
eighbours—the only girl in the place, and allowed
y the old people to have a right to whims and
ancies. Now, in the face of this strange, incom-
rehensible misfortune, she felt the difference. Her
uiet old room! where kind voices had spoken to her,
here *he* had come, saying such words as made her
eart beat; where she had sung to him, and received
ıose tender applauses which had been like treasure
) Lottie. She seemed to see a series of past scenes
ke pictures rising before her. Not often had Rollo
een there—yet two or three times; and Mrs. O'Shaugh-
essy, with her mellow brogue, and Mr. Ashford, and
ven the *stately person of the* Dean himself. She had

been at home here, to receive them, whoever came. The room had never been invaded by anything that was unfriendly or unpleasing. Now—what was it that woman said of changes—making it look nice? Lottie had not understood the words when they were said, but they came back upon her now.

By-and-by she heard some one coming upstairs, and, starting, rose to steal away to her own room, afraid to meet the stranger again; but no light made its appearance, and Law put in his head at the door, then seeing something moving against the window, came to her, and threw himself down on the window-seat. "They're going on so downstairs, that I couldn't stand it," said Law; "it's enough to make a fellow sick"—and then, after a pause, "Well! I told you what was coming, but you wouldn't believe me; what do you think of it now?"

"Oh, Law, what does it mean?—Are we not dreaming? Can it be true?"

"True! of course it is true. I told you what was going to happen." Then his tone softened. "Poor Lottie, it's you I'm sorry for. If you could only see yourself beside her! And where were his eyes, that he couldn't see?" Here Law paused abruptly, wondering all at once whether the difference would be as marked between his sister and the girls whom he too

liked to spend his evenings with. He was sure that Emma was not like that woman; but still the thought subdued his indignation. "I say," he added hastily, "I want to give you a bit of advice. Just you give in to her, Lottie. Fighting is no good: she has got a tongue that you couldn't stand, and the things she would say you wouldn't understand. I understand her well enough; but you wouldn't know what she meant, and it would make you angry and hurt you. Give in, Lottie. Since the governor's been so silly, she has a right. And don't you make any stand as if you could do it—for you can't. It is a great deal better not to resist——"

"What do you mean by resist? How can I resist? The house is papa's, I suppose?" said Lottie. "The thing is, I don't understand it. I can't understand it: that somebody should be coming to stay here, to be one of us, to be mixed up in everything—whom we don't know——"

"To be mistress," said Law, "that's the worst—not to be mixed up with us, but to be over us. To take everything out of your hands——"

"Do you think I care for that? I do not mind who is mistress," said Lottie, all unaware of her own characteristics. Law was wiser than she was in this respect. *He shook his* head.

"That's the worst," he said; "she'll be mistress—she'll change everything. Oh, I know Polly well; though I suppose, for decency, I mustn't say Polly now."

"How is it you know her so well? And how did papa know her?" said Lottie. "I should have thought you never could have met such women. Ah! you told me once about—others. Law! you can't like company like that; surely, you can't like company like that! how did you get to know her?" Law was very much discomfited by this sudden question. In the midst of his sympathy and compassion for his sister, it was hard all at once to be brought to book, when he had forgotten the possibility of such a danger.

"Well, you know," he said, "fellows do; I don't know how it is—you come across some one, and then she speaks to you, and then you're forced to speak back; or perhaps it's you that speaks first—it isn't easy to tell. This was as simple as anything," Law went on, relieved by the naturalness of his own explanation. "They all work in the same house where Langton lives, my old coach, you know, before I went to old Ashford. I don't know how the governor got there. Perhaps it was the same way. Going in and out, you know, day after day, why, how could you help *it*? And when a woman speaks to you, what can you *do*, but say something? That's exactly how it was."

"But, Law," she said, grasping his arm—all this conversation was so much easier in the dark—"Law, you will take care? she said she was not quite sure whether it was to be the father or the son. Ah! a woman who could say that, Law——"

"It's a lie," said Law, fiercely, "and she knows it. I never thought anything of her—never. It's a lie, if she were to swear it! Polly! why, she's thirty, she's ——I give my word of honour, it's a lie."

"But, Law! oh, Law dear——"

"I know what you're going to say. I'll take care of myself; no fear of me getting entangled," said Law briskly. Then he stopped, and, still favoured by the dark, took her hands in his. "Lottie, it's my turn now. I know you won't stand questioning, nor being talked to. But, look here—don't shilly-shally if you can care for anybody, and he'll marry you and give you a place of your own—You needn't jump up as if I had shot you. If you talk about such things to me, I may surely talk to you. And mind what I say. I don't expect you'll be able to put up with your life here——"

"I hear them stirring downstairs," said Lottie, drawing her hands out of his hold. "Don't keep me, don't hold me, Law. I cannot see her again to-night."

"You won't give me any answer," said the lad regretfully. There was *real* feeling in his voice—"But,

Lottie, mind what I say. I don't believe you'll be able to put up with it, and if there's anyone you care for and he'll marry you——"

Lottie freed herself from him violently, and fled. Even in the dark there were things that Law could not be permitted to say, or she to hear.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE HEAVINGS OF THE EARTHQUAKE.

THE next morning dawned very strangely on all e members of the little household. Lottie was down ırly, as she generally was; but the advantages of early sing were neutralised by the condition of the little aid, Mary, who was too much excited to do her work, ıd kept continually coming back to pour her doubts ıd her difficulties into Lottie's ear. "I can't get no st till I've told mother," Mary said. "If there's any-ing wrong, mother won't let me stay, not a day. And ven if there's nothing wrong, I don't know as I'll stay. haven't got no fault to find with you, Miss; nor the aptain, nor even Mr. Law: though he's a dreadful ther with his boots cleaning; but to say as you're ginning as you mean to end, and then to give all at trouble! every blessed thing, I had to drag it up-airs. Mr. Law was very kind; he took up the big x—I couldn't ha' done it; but up and down, up and wn, all the little boxes and the bags, and the brown per parcels—'It saves trouble if you begins as you eans to end,' she *says*——"

"I don't want to hear what Mrs. Despard says," said Lottie. Mrs. Despard: it was her mother's name. And though that mother had not been an ideal mother, or one of those who are worshipped in their children's memories, it is wonderful, what a gush of tender recollections came into Lottie's mind with the name. Poor mamma! she had been very kind in her way, always ready to indulge and to pardon, if indifferent to what happened in more important matters. She had never exacted anything, never worried her children about idleness or untidiness, or any of those minor sins which generally make a small girl's life a burden to her. Lottie's mind went back to her, lying on her sofa, languid, perhaps lazy—badly dressed; yet never anything but a lady, with a kind of graciousness in her faded smile, and grace in her faded gown. Not a woman to be held in adoration, and yet—the girl sighed, but set to work to make the little brown dining-room neat, to get the table set, making up for Mary's distracted service by her own extra activity. For amid all the horrors of last night there was one which had cut Lottie very deeply, and that was the many references to the cold beef, and the bride's dislike of "cold victuals." It is inconceivable, among all the more important matters involved, how deeply wounded Lottie's pride had been by this reproach. She resolved that no one should be able to speak so to-day; and

she herself put on her hat and went out to the shop on the Abbey Hill almost as soon as it had opened, that this intolerable reproach should not be in the interloper's power. She met more than one of the old Chevaliers as she came up, for most of them kept early hours and paced the terrace pavement in the morning as if it had been morning parade. They all looked at her curiously, and one or two stopped her to say "good morning." "And a fine morning it is, and you look as fresh as a flower," one of the old gentlemen said; and another laid his hand on her shoulder, patting her with a tender fatherly touch. "God bless you, my dear, the sight of you is a pleasure," said this old man. How little she had thought or cared for them, and how kind they were in her trouble! She could see that everybody knew. Lottie did not know whether she did not half resent the universal knowledge. Most likely they had known it before she did. The whole town knew it, and everybody within the Precincts. Captain Despard had got married! Such a thing had not occurred before in the memory of man. Many people believed, indeed, that there was a law against it, and that Captain Despard was liable to be turned out of his appointment. Certainly it was unprecedented; for the old Chevaliers before they came to St. Michael's had generally passed the age at which men marry. The *whole* scene seemed to have taken a dif-

ferent aspect to Lottie. Since her home had become impossible to her, it had become dear. For the first time she felt how good it was to look across upon the noble old buttresses of the Abbey, to inhabit that "retired leisure," that venerable quietness. If only that woman were not there! But that woman was there, and everything was changed. Lottie had been rudely awakened, dragged, as it were, out of her dreams. She could not think as she usually did of the meetings that were sure to come somehow in the Abbey, or on the Slopes—or count how long it would be till the afternoon or evening, when she should see him. This, though it was her life, had been pushed out of the way. She thought of all last night's remarks about the cold beef and the poor fare, and the changes that were going to be made. Would she think bacon good enough for breakfast?—would she be satisfied with th rolls, which Lottie herself felt to be a holiday indu gence? Pride, and nothing but pride, had thrown t girl into such excesses. She could not endure th criticisms again. Her brain was hot and hazy, with having any power of thought. The confusion of night was still in her. Would it all turn out a dr or would the door open by-and-by and show thi accustomed figure? Lottie did not feel that she be sure of anything. The first to come dow Law, who had been forced from his bed for o

sympathy. Law was very kind to Lottie. "I thought I wouldn't leave you to face her by yourself," he said; "they're coming down directly." Then Lottie knew that it was no dream.

The bride came down in a blue merino dress, as blue as the silk of last night. Polly was of opinion that she looked well in blue; and it was not one of the ethereal tints that are now used, but a good solid, full blue, quite uncompromising in point of colour And the hair on her head was piled up as if it would reach the skies, or the ceiling at least. She came down arm-in-arm with her husband, the two smiling upon each other, while Law and Lottie stood one on each side of the table with no smiles, looking very serious. It was Mrs. Despard who did the most of the conversation; for the Captain was passive, feeling, it must be allowed, somewhat embarrassed by the presence of his children, who did not embarrass her at all. But she did not think the bacon very good. She thought it badly cooked. She thought the girl could not have been well trained to send it up like that. And she was not pleased either with the rolls; but announced her intention of changing the baker as well as the butcher. "We've always gone to Willoughby's, as long as I can recollect, and I don't fancy any bread but his." Lottie did not say anything, she was nearly as silent as on the previous night; and Law, who was

opposite, though he made faces at her now and then, and did his best to beguile his sister into a laugh, did not contribute much to the conversation. He got up as soon as he had swallowed his breakfast and got his books. "I'm off to old Ashford," he said.

"Where are you going, Law?—you must never get up from table without asking my leave—it is dreadful unmannerly. You have got into such strange ways; you want me to bring you back to your manners, all of you. Who are you going to?—not to Mr. Langton as you used to do—I'm glad of that."

"I don't see why you should be glad of that. I'm going to old Ashford," said Law, gloomily. "He is a much better coach than Langton. I have not anything to do to-day, Lottie; I shall be back at twelve o'clock."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Despard, "how long is Law going on going to school like a little boy? I never heard of such a thing, at his age. He should be put into something where he could earn a little money for himself, instead of costing money; a great, strong young fellow like that. I think you're all going to sleep here. You want me, as anybody can see, to wake you up, and save you from being put upon, my poor man. But *I* hope I know how to take care of my own husband, and see that he gets the good of what he has, and

don't just throw it away upon other folks. And I begin as I means to end," said Polly, with a little toss of her head. Law, stopped by the sound of her voice, had turned round at the door, and contemplated her with gloomy looks; but seeing it was not to come to anything bad, went away. And the bell began, and the Captain rose. His bride came to him fondly, and brushed a crumb or two off his coat and arranged the flower in his buttonhole. "Now you look quite sweet," she said with genuine enthusiasm. "I ain't going in the morning, when none but the regular folks is there, but I mean to go, my dear, in the afternoon. It's only proper respect, living in the Precincts; but you won't be long, dear? You'll come home to your poor little wife, that don't know what to do without her handsome husband? Now, won't you, dear?"

"I'll be back as fast as my legs can carry me," said the Captain. "Come and meet me, my pet. Lottie will tell you when the voluntary begins——"

"Oh, I can tell very well without Lottie," said the bride, hanging upon him till he reached the door. All these endearments had an indescribable effect upon the girl, who was compelled to stand by. Lottie turned her back to them and re-arranged the ornaments on the mantelpiece, with trembling hands, exasperated almost beyond the power of self-restraint. But when the Captain *was gone, looking* back in his imbecility to

kiss his hand to his bride, the situation changed at once. Polly turned round, sharp and business-like, in a moment. "Ring the bell, Miss," she said, "and tell the girl to clear them things away. And then, if you will just hand me over the keys, and let me see your housekeeping things and your stores and all that, we may settle matters without any trouble. I likes to begin as I mean to end," said Polly peremptorily. Lottie stood and looked at her for a moment, her spirit rekindling, her mind rising up in arms against the idea of obedience to this stranger. But what would be the use of trying to resist? Resist! what power had she? The very pride which rebelled against submission made the submission inevitable. She could not humiliate herself by a vain struggle. Polly, who was very doubtful of the yielding of this natural adversary, and rather expected to have a struggle for her "rights," was quite bewildered by the meekness with which the proud girl, who scarcely took any notice of her, she thought, acquiesced in the orders she gave. Lottie rang the bell. She said, "You will prefer, I am sure, to give Mary her orders without me. There are not many keys, but I will go and get what I have."

"Not many keys! and you call yourself a housekeeper?" said Polly. Lottie turned away as the little *maid* came in, looking impertinent enough to be a *match* for the new mistress; but Lottie was no match

for her. She went and got out her little housekeeping-book, which she had kept so neatly. She gathered the keys of the cupboards, which generally stood unlocked, for there was not so much in them that she should lock them up. Lottie had all the instincts of a housekeeper. It gave her positive pain to hand over the symbols of office—to give up her occupation. Her heart sank as she prepared to do it. All her struggles about the bills, her anxious thought how this and that was to be paid, seemed elements of happiness now. She could not bear to give them up. The pain of this compulsory abdication drove everything else out of her head. Love, they say, is all a woman's life, but only part of a man's; yet Lottie forgot even Rollo —forgot his love and all the consolation it might bring, in this other emergency, which was petty enough, yet all-important to her. She trembled as she got together these little symbols of her domestic sovereignty. She heard the new mistress of the house coming up the stairs as she did so, talking all the way. "I never heard such impudence," Polly was saying. "Speak back to her mistress! a bit of a chit of a maid-of-all-work like that. I suppose she's been let do whatever she pleased; but she'll find out the difference." Behind Polly's voice came a gust of weeping from below, and a cry of, "I'm going to tell mother:" thus hostilities had commenced all along the line.

"I can't think how ever you got on with a creature like that," said Polly, throwing herself down in the easy-chair. "She don't know how to do a single thing, as far as I can see; but some folks never seem to mind. She shan't stay here not a day longer than I can help. I've given her warning on the spot. To take impudence from a servant the very first day! But that's always the way when things are let go; the moment they find a firm hand over them there's a to-do. To be sure it wasn't to be looked for that you could know much, Miss, about managing a house."

"Mary is a very good girl," said Lottie hastily. "She has always done what I told her. Here are the keys of the cupboards, since you wish for them; but there are not any stores to lock away. I get the things every week, just enough to use——"

"And don't lock them up!" Polly threw up her hands. "That's one way of housekeeping; but how should you know any better, poor thing, brought up like that! I'm sure I don't mean to be hard upon you; but you should have thought a bit of your papa, and not have wasted his money. However, that's all over now. A man wants a nice 'ome to come back to, he wants a nice dinner on the table, he wants somebody that can talk to him, to keep him out of mischief. Oh, I know very well the Captain's been fond of having his fling. I ain't one of the ignorant

nes, as don't know a man's ways. And I like that ort much the best myself. I like a man to be a man, nd know what's what. But you'll soon see the diference, now that he's got some one to amuse him, nd some one to make him comfortable at home. So hese are all, Miss Lottie? And what's this? oh, a ook! I don't think much of keeping books. You now how much you has to spend, and you spend it; hat's my way."

Lottie made no reply. She felt it to be wiser for erself, but no doubt it was less respectful to Polly, ho paused now and then for a reply, then went on gain, loving to hear herself talk, yet feeling the conempt involved in this absence of all response. At ast she cried angrily, "Have you lost your tongue, iss, or do you think as I'm not good enough to have n answer, though I'm your papa's wife?"

"I beg your pardon," said Lottie; "I—don't know hat to say to you. We don't know each other. I lon't understand—— Don't you see," she cried sudlenly, unable to restrain herself, "that since you came nto the house you have done nothing but—find fault ith all my—arrangements—" (these mild words came ith the utmost difficulty; but Lottie was too proud to uarrel). "You can't think that I could like that. I ave done my best, and if you try as I have done, you ill find it *is not so easy*. But I don't want to defend

myself; that is why I don't say anything. There can be no good in quarrelling, whether you think me a bad housekeeper or not."

"I ain't so sure of that," said Polly. "Have a good flare-up, and be done with it, that's my way. I don't hold with your politeness, and keeping yourself to yourself. I'd rather quarrel than be always bursting with spite and envy, like some folks. It stands to reason as you must hate me, taking things out of your hands; and it stands to reason as I should think more of my own husband than of keeping up your brother and you in idleness. But for all that, and though we might fight now and then—everybody does, I don't care nothing for a girl as is always the same—I don't see why we shouldn't get on neither. The Captain says as you've a very good chance of a husband yourself. And though I'm just about your own age, I've had a deal of experience. I know how to bring a man to the point, if he's shilly-shallying, or won't speak up like a man, as a girl has a right to expect."

"Oh! stop, stop, stop!" cried Lottie, wild with horror. She cast a hurried glance round, to see what excuse she could make for getting away. Then she seized eagerly upon her music which lay on the old square piano. "I must go to my lesson," she said.

"Your lesson! Are you having lessons too? Upon *my* word! Oh, my poor husband! my poor Captain!

No wonder as he has nothing but cold beef to eat," said Polly, with all the fervour of a deliverer, finding out one misery after another. "And if one might make so bold as to ask, Miss, who is it as has the honour to give lessons to you?"

"The Signor—Mr. Rossinetti," Lottie added, after a moment. It seemed desecration to talk of any of the familiar figures within the Abbey precincts by their familiar title to this intruder.

"Oh! I'm not so ignorant as not to know who the Signor is. That will be half-a-guinea, or at the least seven-and-six a lesson!" she said, raising her hands in horror. "Oh, my poor 'usband! This is how his money goes! Miss," said Polly, severely, "you can't expect as I should put up with such goings on. I have your papa to think of, and I won't see him robbed—no, not whatever you may do. For I call that robbery, just nothing else. Half-a-guinea a lesson, and encouraging Law to waste his time! I can't think how you can do it: with that good, dear, sweet, confiding man letting you have your own way, and suspecting nothing," cried Polly, clasping her hands. Then she got up suddenly. "I declare, she cried, "church is near over, and me not ready to go out and meet him! I can't go out a figure, in a common rag like this, and me a bride. I must put on my silk. Of course, he wants *to show me* off a bit before his friends. I'll

run and get ready, and we can talk of this another time."

Thus Lottie escaped for the moment. She was asked a little later to see if Mrs. Despard's collar was straight, and to pin on her veil. "Do I look nice?" said Polly triumphant, and at the same time mollified by the services which Lottie rendered without objection. She had put on her "blue silk" and the bonnet with the orange-blossoms, and neckties enough to stock a shop. "Perhaps, as there's nothing ordered, and I mean to make a change with the tradespeople, the Captain and me won't come back to dinner," said Polly. "There's your favourite cold beef, Miss, for Law and you." Lottie felt that she began to breathe when, rustling and mincing, her strange companion swept out, in the face of all the people who were dispersing from matins, to meet her husband. Polly liked the wondering encounter of all their eyes. With her blue silk sweeping the pavement after her, and her pink parasol, and the orange-blossoms on her bonnet, her figure descending the Dean's Walk alone, while all the others issued out of the Abbey doors, was conspicuous enough. She was delighted to find that everybody looked at her, and even that some stood still to watch her, looking darkly at her finery. These were *the* people who were jealous, envious of her fine clothes *and* her happiness, or jealous of her handsome hus-

band, who met her presently, but who perhaps was not so much delighted to see her amidst all his fellow-Chevaliers as she thought. Captain Despard was not a man of very fine perceptions; but though his blooming young wife was a splendid object indeed beside the dark, little old figure of Mrs. Temple, he had seen enough to feel that the presence of the old lady brought out into larger prominence something which the younger lacked. But he met her with effusive delight, and drew her hand within his arm, and thus they disappeared together. Outside the Precincts there was no need to make any comparison, and Polly's brilliancy filled all hearts with awe.

When Law returned, he found Lottie seated in her little chair, with her face hidden in her hands. It was not that she was crying, as he feared at first. The face she raised to him was crimson with excitement. "Oh, Law!" she said, "Law, Law!" Lottie had got beyond the range of words. After a while she told him all the events of the morning, which did not look half so important when they were told, and they tried to lay their heads together and think what was best to be done. But what could anyone do? Mary could scarcely put the remnants of the cold beef on the table, for her eagerness to tell that she had been to mother, and mother would not hear of her staying. "Places isn't *so hard to* get as all that, for a girl with

good character," she said. When she was gone, Lottie looked piteously at her brother.

"What kind of a place could I get?" she said. "What am I fit for? Oh, Law! I think it is a mistake to be brought up a lady. I never thought it before, but I do now. How can we go on living here? and where are we to go?"

"That's what I always said," said Law. He was horribly grave, but he had not a word to say except that he had got a match at football, and perhaps might stay and sup with the fellows afterwards. "I'm just as well out of the way, for what can I do for you? only make things worse," he said. And though he had been so kind and sympathetic at first, Law stole away, glad to escape, and left Lottie alone, to bear it as she might. She had no lesson that day, though she had pretended to have one. She would not go to the Abbey, where the new member of the family meant to appear, she knew. Lottie stayed in the familiar room which was hers no longer, until the silence became too much for her, and she felt that any human voice would be a relief. She went out in the afternoon, when all seemed quiet, when everybody had gone to the Abbey for the evening service. There would be nobody about, and it seemed to Lottie that the shame was upon her, that it was she who must shrink from all eyes. Mrs O'Shaughnessy, however, knocking on the windo

violently, instantly gave her to understand that this was impracticable. The girl tried to resist, being afraid of what she might say, and of what might be said to her. But as she hurried on, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's maid rushed after her. Lottie had to go to her old friend, though very reluctantly. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy had a bad cold. She was sitting wrapped up in a shawl, and a visitor with something to tell was beyond price to her. "Come and tell me all about it, then!" she cried, "me poor darlin'!" enveloping Lottie in her large embrace. "And tell the Major, Sally, and let nobody come in." The Major came instantly to the call, and Lottie tried to tell her story to the kind couple who sat on either side of her, with many an exclamation.

"I knew that was what it would come to," Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said.

"And I never thought Despard (saving your presence, my dear) could have been such a fool!" cried the Major.

"Oh, sure, Major, you're old enough to know that every man is a fool where a woman's concerned."

But what was Lottie to do? They petted her and condoled with her, soothing her with their sympathy, and all the tender words they could think of; but they could throw *no light upon* one point: what could the

girl do? Nothing, but put up with it. They shook their heads, but could give her no comfort. If Law had but been doing something instead of idling all his time away! But then Law was not doing anything. What was he good for, any more than Lottie?

"Mary can get another place. Her mother will not let her stay, and she can get another place, she says; but here are two of us, Law and I, and we are good for nothing!" cried Lottie. How her thoughts were altered from the time when she thought it necessary to stay at home, to do no visible work, for the credit of the family! Lottie was not young enough to feel that it was necessary to be consistent. "We are young and strong and able to work, but we are good for nothing!" she said. And they both looked at her blankly, not knowing what to say.

By-and-by Lottie escaped again into the open air, notwithstanding their anxious invitation that she should stay with them. She was too wretched to stay, and there had come upon her a longing to see another face in which there might be comfort. As she went out she almost walked into Captain Temple's arms, who was walking slowly along looking up at her window. The old man took both her hands into his. "My poor child!" he said. He was not so frankly inquisitive as the good people she had just left, but he drew her

and through his arm and walked with her, bending over her.

"I do not want to tempt you from your duty, my dear; you'll do what is right, I am sure you will do what is right. But I can't bear to think you are in trouble, and we so near. And my wife," said the old man slightly faltering, "my wife thinks so, too." He was not quite so sure of his wife. She had the restraining effect upon her husband which a more reserved and uncommunicative mind has over an impulsive one. He knew what he would like to do, but he was not sure of her, and this put hesitation into his speech.

"Oh! Captain Temple," cried Lottie, moved at last to tears, "what am I to do? If I cannot bear it, what am I to do?"

"Come and speak to my wife," he said; "come, dear, and see my wife. She can't talk about everything as I do, but she has more sense than anyone, and knows the world. Come with me, Lottie, and see what Mrs. Temple says."

He thought the sight of the girl in her trouble would be enough, and that his wife would certainly say what it was on his own lips to say. Just then, however, there was a sound of doors opening, and old Wykeham came out and looked upon the world with a

defiant countenance from the south door of the Al which was a sign that service was over; and the of the voluntary began to peal out into the air. I drew her arm from that of her old friend—she not bear the eyes of the crowd. "Another time other time; but I must go now," she cried, esc from him and turning towards the Slopes. Th Captain's first impulse was to follow. He stood moment gazing after her as she sped along, slim swift and young, up the deserted road. It wa ginning to grow dark, and the evening was colder it had been yet. Where was she going? To he vourite haunt on the Slopes to get the wind in face; to let her thoughts go, like birds, into the space and distance? If that had been all! The man thought of an alternative which filled him alarm. He took a step after her, and then he pa again, and shaking his head, turned back, meetin the people as they streamed out of the Abbey. child! if she did meet *him* there, what then? It w comfort her to see her lover; and if he was good the anxious old Chevalier hoped, had not the l more power to save her than all the world? There no question of taking Lottie from her father mother, separating her from her home. If this y man were to offer her a home of her own, where c there be so good a solution to the problem? Ca

Temple turned and walked home with a sigh. It was not his way of delivering Lottie, but perhaps it was the way that would be most for her happiness, and who was he that he should interfere? He let her go to her fate with a sigh.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### LOTTIE'S FATE.

LOTTIE went up the Dean's Walk hastily, feeling as if she had taken flight. And she was taking flight. She could not bear to meet the people coming from the Abbey, among whom no doubt her father and his wife would be. Lottie was scarcely aware that there was anything else in her mind. She hurried to the Slopes as the natural refuge of her trouble. The wind blowing fresh in her face, the great sweep of distance, the air and the clouds, the familiar rustle of the trees, seemed to have become part of her, a necessity of her living. And the Slopes were almost deserted now. In October the night comes early, the afternoon is short, even before the winds become chill; already it was darkening, though the afternoon service was but newly over. The trees were beginning to lose their gorgeous apparel: every breeze shook down hosts of leaves, shreds of russet brown and pale gold; the wind was wistful and mournful, with a sigh in it that promised rain. Lottie saw nobody about. She stole through the trees to her favourite corner, and leaned

pon the low parapet, looking over the familiar scene. he was so familiar with it, every line; and yet it emed to her to-night like scenery in a theatre which y-and-by would collapse and split asunder, and give lace to something different. It would vanish from er sight, and in place of it there would appear the im background of one of the little rooms at home, ith a figure in a blue gown relieved against it, tossing out a mountain of braids and plaits. Lottie did not el sure that this figure would not appear at her very de, lay an imperative hand on her shoulder, and der her to give up the secrets of her own being. hus she carried her care within her. She stood aning over the parapet, with the trees rustling around, arcely aware what she was thinking of. Did she xpect anyone? She would have said, No. The night as overcast and growing dismal, why should she ex- ect anyone? What reason could he have for coming ut here? He could have no instinctive knowledge of er misery, to bring him, and he had no longer that xcuse of his cigar after dinner as on the happy nights hen the air was still like summer. No! it was only r the stillness, only for the air, only to fling her oublesome thoughts out to the horizon and empty er mind, and thus feel it possible to begin again, iat she had come. And never had that stillness been o still *before*. *By-and-by* this scene would melt away,

and it would be the little dining-room in the Lodge, with the white tablecloth and the lamp lighted upon it. She had been weary of her home, she had half despised it; but never had she been disgusted, afraid of it, never loathed the thought of going back to it before. And she could not talk to anybody about this; they were all very kind, ready to be sorry for her, to do anything they could for her, but she could not bear their sympathy to-night.

All at once, in the silence which was so full of the whisper of the leaves and the sighs of the wind, that she had not heard any footstep, there came a voice close to her elbow which made Lottie start.

"Is it really you, Miss Despard? I had almost given up hopes;—and alone! I thought you were never to be alone again?" said Rollo, with pleasure in his voice.

How it startled her! She looked round upon him with so much fright in her eyes that he was half vexed, half angered. Was it possible that Lottie after all was just like the rest, pretending to be astonished by his appearance when she knew as well——

"You surely are not surprised to see me?" he said with a short laugh.

"I did not think of seeing you," she said quiet and looked away from him again.

Rollo was angry, yet he was touched by some

in her tone; and there must be something to cause this sudden change. She had always been so frank and simple in her welcome of him, always with a light of pleasure on her face when he came in sight; but she would not so much as let him see her face now. She looked round with that first start, then turned again and resumed her dreamy gaze into the night. And there was dejection in every line of her figure as she stood dimly outlined against the waning light. Suddenly there came into Rollo's mind a recollection that he had heard something to account for this, without accusing her of petty pretence or affectation.

"Something has happened," he said, with a sense of relief which surprised himself. "I remember now. I fear you are not happy about it."

"No," she said, with a sigh. Then Lottie made a little effort to recover herself; perhaps he would not care about her troubles. "It has been a great shock," she said, "but perhaps it may not be so bad after a while."

"Tell me," said Rollo; "you know how much interest I take in everything that concerns you. Surely, Miss Despard, after this long time that we have been seeing each other, you know that? Won't you tell me? I cannot bear to see you so sad, so unlike yourself."

"Perhaps *that is the* best thing that could happen,"

said Lottie, "that I should be unlike myself. I wish I could be like someone with more sense; I have been so foolish! Everybody knows that we are poor; I never concealed it, but I never thought—— Oh! how silly we have been, Law and I! I used to scold him, but I never saw that I was just the same myself. We ought to have learned to do something, if it were only a trade. We are both young and strong, but we are good for nothing, not able to do anything. I used to scold him: but I never thought that I was just as bad myself."

"Don't say so, don't say so! You were quite right to scold him; men ought to work. But *you*," cried Rollo with real agitation, "it is not to be thought of. You! don't speak of such a thing. What is the world coming to, when you talk of working, while such a fellow as I——"

"Ah! that is quite different," said Lottie. "You are rich, or, at least, you are the same as if you were rich; but we are really poor, we have no money: and everything we have, it is papa's. I suppose he has a right to do whatever he likes with it; it seems strange, but I suppose he has a right. And, then, what is to become of us? How could I be so silly as not to think of that before? It is all my own fault; don't *think* I am finding fault with papa, Mr. Ridsdale. I *suppose* he has a right, and I don't want to grumble;

it only—seems natural—to tell you." Lottie did not know what an admission she was making. She sighed again into that soft distant horizon, then turned to him with a smile trembling about her lips. It was a relief to tell him—she could speak to him as she could not speak to Captain Temple or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, though she had known them so much longer. "Perhaps I am only out of temper," she said. She could not but feel more light of heart standing beside him with nobody near; they seemed to belong to each other so.

"How good, how sweet of you to say so," he cried. "Then treat me as if it were natural; come and sit down—nobody will interrupt us—and tell me everything I want to know."

They had met together in Lottie's little drawing-room before, in the eye of day, and three or four times under Lady Caroline's eye; but never before like this, in the twilight, all alone in the world, as it were, two of them, and no more. Lottie hesitated for a moment; but what could be wrong in it? There was nobody to disturb them, and her heart was so full; and to talk to him was so pleasant. She seemed able to say more to him than to any other. He understood her at half a word, whereas to the others she had to say everything, to say even more than she meant before they saw *what she meant.* She sat down, accordingly,

in the corner of the seat, and told him all that had happened; herself beginning to see some humour in it as she told the story, half laughing one moment, half crying the next. And Rollo went into it with all his heart. All their meetings had produced their natural effect; for the last fortnight he had felt that he ought to go away, but he had not gone away. He could not deprive himself of her, of their intercourse, which was nothing yet implied so much, those broken conversations, and the language of looks, that said so much more than words. Never, perhaps, had his intercourse with any girl been so simple, yet so unrestrained. If the old Captain sometimes looked at him with suspicion, he was the only one who did so; and Lottie had neither suspicion nor doubt of him, nor had any question as to his "intentions" arisen in her mind. She told him her grief now, not dully, with the heavy depression that cannot be moved, but with gleams of courage, of resolution, even of fun, unable to resist the temptation of Polly's absurdity, seeing it now as she had not been able to see it before. "I never knew before," she said fervently, "what a comfort it was to talk things over—but, then, whom could I talk them over with? Law, who thinks it best not to think, never to mind—but sometimes one is obliged to mind: or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, whom I cannot say everything to—— or;—Mr. Ridsdale\" said Lottie, in

alarm—"pray, pray forgive me if I have bored you. I have been pouring out everything to you. I never thought—I did not intend——"

"Don't tell me that," he said. "I hoped you did intend to confide in me, to trust to my sympathy. Who can be so much interested? to whom can it be so important——?" He leaned forward closer to her, and Lottie instinctively drew away from him a hairs-breadth; but she thought that quite natural too, as natural as that she should be able to speak to him better than to anyone else. They had both made the whole avowal of their hearts in saying these words; but it had not been done in words which frightened either or changed their position towards each other. Meanwhile she was content enough, quieted by the sense of leaning her trouble upon him, while he was gradually growing into agitation. Lottie had got all her emergency required—his sympathy, his support, the understanding that was so dear to her. After all her trouble she had a moment of ease; her heart was no longer sore, but soothed with the balm of his tender pity and indignation.

But that which calmed Lottie threw Rollo into ever-increasing agitation. A man who has said so much as that to a girl, especially to one who is in difficulty and trouble, is bound even to himself to say more. *The crisis* began for him where for her it

momentarily ended. To love her and as good as tell her so, to receive, thus ingenuously given, that confession of instinctive reliance upon him which was as good as a betrayal of her love; and to let her go and say nothing more—could a man do that and yet be a man? Rollo was not a man who had done right all the days of his life. He had been in very strange company, and had gone through many an adventure; but he was a man whom vice had never done more than touch. Even among people of bad morals he had not known how to abandon the instincts of honour; and in such an emergency what was he to do? Words came thronging to his lips, but his mind was distracted with his own helplessness. What had he to offer? how could he marry? he asked himself with a kind of despair. Yet something must be thought of, something suggested. "Lottie," he said after that strange pause —"Lottie—I cannot call you Miss Despard any more, as if I were a stranger. Lottie, you know very well that I love you. I am as poor as you are, but I cannot bear this. You must trust to me for everything—you must—Lottie, you are not afraid to trust yourself to me—you don't doubt me?" he cried. His mind was driven wildly from one side to another. Marry! how could he marry in his circumstances? Was it possible *that* there was anything else that would answer the purpose, any compromise? His heart beat wildly with

love and ardour and shame. What would she say? Would she understand him, though he could not understand himself?

"Mr. Ridsdale!" cried Lottie, shrinking back from him a little. She covered her face with her hands and began to cry, being overcome with so many emotions, one heaped on another. At another moment she would not have been surprised; she would have been able to lift her eyes to the glow of the full happiness which, in half-light, had been for weeks past the illumination of her life. But for the moment it dazzled her. She put up her hands between her and that ecstasy of light.

As for Rollo, very different were the thoughts in his mind. He thought Lottie as wise as himself: he thought she had investigated his words; had not found in them the one that is surety for all, and shrank from him. Shame overwhelmed him: the agony of a mind which was really honest and a heart which was full of tenderness, yet found themselves on the verge of dishonour. "Lottie!" he cried with anguish in his voice, "you do not understand me—you will not listen to me. Do not shrink as if I meant any harm."

Then she uncovered her face, and he saw dimly through the twilight a countenance all trembling with emotion and happiness and astonishment. "Harm!" she said, with wonder in her voice—"harm!" His heart

seemed to stand still, and all his confused thinkings broken off in the unspeakable contrast between the simplicity of her innocence thinking no evil, and the mere knowledge in his mind which, if nothing more, made guilt possible. Such a contrast shamed and horrified, and filled with an adoration of penitence, the man who might have drawn her into evil, ambiguously, had it been possible. He found himself with one knee on the cold gravel, before he knew, pressing his suit upon her with passion. "Lottie, you must marry me, you must be my wife, you must let me be the one to work, to take care of you, to protect you from all trouble," he cried. But what did Lottie want with those more definite words which he had thought she missed and waited for? Had she not known his secret long ago before he ever spoke a word to her? Had she not been led delicately, tenderly, step by step, through infinite dreams and visions, towards this climax? She cried with happiness and trouble, and the sense of deliverance.

"Oh, why should you kneel to me?" she said. "Do you think it needs *that?*" While he, more happy than ever he had been in his life, alarmed, disturbed, shaken out of all his habits and traditions, held her fast, like a new-found treasure, and lavished every tender word upon her that language could supply. He owed her a *million* apologies, of not one of which Lottie was con-

scious. How could it have been possible for her to suppose that even for a second, in his inmost thoughts, he had been less than reverent of her? And he—had he meant any harm! He did not think he had meant any harm; yet how, in the name of heaven, was he to marry—how was he to marry—in his present circumstances? While he was pouring out upon Lottie his love and worship, telling her how she had gathered to herself day by day all his thoughts and wishes, this question rose up again in his heart.

"I know," said Lottie, very low—her voice still trembling with the first ecstasy of feeling. It was like the dove's voice, all tenderness and pathos, coming out of her very heart. "I guessed it long—oh, long ago——"

"How did you do that? Whisper, darling—tell me —when did you first think——?"

Is not this the A B C of lovers? and yet her tone implied a little more than the happy divining of the easy secret. She laughed softly—a variety of music in his ear—the two faces were so close.

"You did not think I knew anything about it. I saw you—looking up at my window—the very night of the wedding. Do you remember?" Again Lottie's low happy laugh broke into the middle of her words. "I could not think what it meant. And then another time before I knew *you*—and then—— You did not

suppose I saw you. I could not believe it," she said, with a soft sigh of content. Laugh or sigh, what did it matter, they meant the same: the delight of a discovery which was no discovery—the happy right of confessing a consciousness which she dared not have betrayed an hour ago—of being able to speak of it all: the two together, alone in all the world, wanting nothing and no one. This was what Lottie meant. But her disclosures struck her lover dumb. What would she say if she knew his real object then? A prima donna who was to make his fortune—a new voice to be produced in an opera! He shuddered as he drew her closer to him, with terror—with compunction, though he had meant no harm. And he loved her now if he did not love her then; with all his heart now—all the more tenderly, he thought, that she had mistaken him, that she had been so innocently deceived.

By this time it had got dark, though they did not observe it; yet not quite dark, for it is rarely dark out of doors under the free skies, as it is within four walls. It was Lottie who suddenly awoke to this fact with start.

"It must be late—I must go home," she said. A when she looked about among the ghostly trees wh waved and bent overhead, sombre and colourles the dark—she thought, with a thrill of horror,

hours must have passed since she came here. Rollo too was slightly alarmed. They were neither of them in a condition to measure time; and though so much had happened, it had flown like a moment. They came out from among the trees in the happy gloom, arm-in-arm. Nobody could recognise them, so dark as it was—and indeed nobody was in the way to recognise them—and the Abbey clock struck as they emerged upon the Dean's Walk, reassuring them. Rollo was still in time for dinner, though Lottie might be too late for tea; and the relief of discovering that it was not so late as they thought gave them an excuse for lingering. He walked to the Lodges with her, and then she turned back with him; and finally they strayed round the Abbey in the darkness, hidden by it, yet not so entirely hidden as they thought. Only one little jar came to the perfect blessedness of this progress homeward.

"Shall you tell them?" Lottie whispered, just before she took leave of her lover, with a movement of her hand towards the Deanery.

This gave Rollo a *serrement de cœur*. He replied hastily, "Not to-night," with something like a shiver, and then he added, "Where shall I see you to-morrow?"

This question struck Lottie with the same shock and jar of feeling. *Would* not he come and claim her

to-morrow? This was what she had thought. She did not know what to reply, and a sudden sensation of undefined trouble—of evil not yet so entirely over as she hoped—came into her mind; but he added, before she could speak—

"In the old place—that blessed corner which I love better than any other in the world. Will you come while everybody is at the Abbey, Lottie? for we must talk over everything."

This melted the little momentary vexation away, and she promised. And thus they parted perforce—opposite Captain Despard's door. How glad Lottie was that the door was open! It stood open all through the summer, and the habits of the summer were scarcely over. By the light in the dining-room downstairs and the sound of the voices she divined that tea was not yet over. But she was not able to encounter Mrs. Despard to-night. She did not want to see anyone. Her heart was still so full of delicious tumult, her eyes of sweet tears. She had gone out so sorrowful, so indignant, not knowing what was to become of her. And now she knew what was to become of her—the most beautiful, happy fate. He had said he was poor. What did it matter if he was poor? Was she not used to that? Lottie knew, and said to herself with secret joy, that she was the right wife for a poor man. He might have got the noblest of brides, and

she would not have been so fit for him; but *she* was fit for that post if ever a young woman was. She would take care of the little he had, which one might be sure he would never do himself—he was too generous, too kind for that; Lottie loved him for his prodigality, even while she determined to control it. She would take care of him and do everything for him, as no woman used to wealth could do. And she would spur him on so that he should do great things—things which he had not done heretofore, only because he had not stimulus enough. He should have stimulus enough now, with a wife who would exult in all he did, and support him with sympathy and help. It was not any passive position that she mapped out for herself. She knew what it meant to be poor, far better than Rollo did. And she did not mind it. Why should she mind it? She had been used to it all her life. She would not care what she did. But he should never have to blush for his wife as a drudge. She would never forget her position, and his position, which was so much greater than hers. This was the first time that Lottie thought of his position. She did so now with a heightening of colour, and louder throb of her heart. By this time she was sitting in her own room without even a candle, glad of the seclusion and of the darkness in which she could think, unbetrayed even to herself. Her heart *gave a bound,* and a flush came to her

cheek. There could be no doubt now about her position. No one could dream, no one could think that Rollo's wife was ever to be looked down upon. This gave her a distinct thrill of pleasure; and then she passed it by, to return to a dearer subject—Himself! how anxious he had been! as if it were possible she could have resisted his love. He had wooed her, she thought, as if she had been a princess—doubling Lottie's happiness by doing in this respect the thing she felt to be most right and fit, though, oh! so unnecessary in respect to herself! Could he really have any doubt how it would turn out? The thought of this humility in her hero brought tears of love and happiness to Lottie's eyes. Was she the same girl who had sat here in gloom and darkness only last night, wondering what was to become of her? But how was she to know how soon fate would unfold like a flower, and show her what was in store for her? How happy she was—how good, how thankful to God—how char table to others! She could have gone downstairs a said something kind even to Polly, had it not been fear of betraying herself. Everything that was te and sweet blossomed out in her heart. She wa happy. Is not that the moment in which the he most pure, most kind, most humble and tender? hand seemed to be touching her, blessing he she in her turn was ready to bless all the worl

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT.

THE appearance of the new Mrs. Despard in the Abbey made a very great impression. The brilliancy of her blue silk and the bushiness of her orange-blossoms were calculated to strike awe into all beholders. There was scarcely a lady within the Precincts who did not feel herself personally insulted by the appearance of the milliner girl flaunting in her bridal finery and taking her place by right among them. As for the wives of the Chevaliers, their indignation was too great for words. Mingled curiosity and enmity had brought them out in larger numbers than usual, to see the creature, if she was so lost to every feeling of shame as to show herself; and it is scarcely necessary to say that Polly was in that particular entirely lost to every feeling of shame. She came in with her Captain, clinging to his arm, and whispering to him, even in the sacred quiet of the Abbey, and as the pair were late, and almost the entire congregation had assembled, nothing was wanting to the full enjoyment of her triumph. *Polly felt, when* she raised her head, after

that momentary homage to the sacred place which even in her state of excitement she felt bound to make, that one object of her life was attained, that everybody was staring at her, and that in her blue silk she was more the centre of regard than the Dean himself under his canopy, or the Minor Canon just about to begin the service, who perceptibly paused, in acknowledgment of the little rustle and commotion which accompanied her entrance. The feelings of the ladies among whom this intruder pushed her way may be imagined. It was all that Mrs. O'Shaughnessy could do, she said afterwards, to refrain from throwing her hymn-book at the head of the jaunty Captain, as he handed his bride into her place, before taking his own among his brother Chevaliers. The ladies in the Abbey were divided from their partners, being placed in a lower row, and to see the Captain pass on to his stall with a swing of elation in his step after handing his bride to her seat, was enough to make any veteran blaspheme. Why should a man be so proud of himself because he has got a new wife? The imbecile glow of vanity and self-congratulation which in such circumstances comes over the countenance, nay, the entire person, even of the wisest, conveys exasperation to every looker-on. The sentiment of indignation, however, against Captain Despard was mingled with pity; but scarcely even contempt sufficed to soften the feel-

ing with which Polly in her blue silk was universally regarded. Polly was an intruder, an aggressor. The very way in which she tossed her head upwards with its bristling crown of artificial flowers was an offence. The ladies might have their little differences now and then, and it was an undoubted fact that Mrs. Dalrymple, for instance, who was very well connected, had never been able to endure Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who had no connections at all; but now they all clung together as with one impulse. They crowded upon each other in the seat, so as to leave a clear space between them and Polly, who, unabashed, took full advantage of it, and spread out her flounces, her blue silken skirts around her, with a rustle of defiance. Mrs. Temple was the one who was left next to Mrs. Despard. This lady, who took no notice at first, soon roused up, and putting on her spectacles, looked very seriously at the intruder. Polly faced round upon her, with dauntless readiness, but Mrs. Temple's look was so serious, that even Polly felt somewhat discomfited. She felt this new observer's eyes upon her all the time. "Who was that old woman who stared at me so?" she asked, scarcely taking the trouble to whisper, as her husband led her round the nave while the voluntary was being played. "That! that's the wife of an old idiot who gives himself no end of airs," said the Captain. "I thought *as much," said* Polly, tossing her head, "but

she'll find I can stare just as well as she can. Two can play at that game." She spoke so loudly that some of the people near said, "Hush-sh!" The Signor was just then playing a very delicate cadenza in the minor key.

Mrs. Temple took her old husband's arm without a word, and went straight home. He had not himself been at the service, but met her at the door; where he too saw the bride in her blue silk. The old Captain did nothing but shake his head. He could not trust himself to speak. "What are things coming to?" he said at last, as they got within their own door. "When that young fellow was made a Chevalier, I said nothing could come of it but mischief to the community." Captain Despard, being only fifty, was a young fellow to this veteran. "Never mind the community," said Mrs. Temple, which was a bold thing to say. It was getting late in the October afternoon, and within the little sitting-rooms of the Lodges it seemed dark, coming in even from the grey afternoon skies outside. Mrs. Temple rang for the lamp before she went upstairs to take off her bonnet. She was very full of thought, and sighed as she went. Her own girl, for whom she would so gladly have died, was gone, leaving father and mother desolate—and here was another poor girl who lived, but had no one to care for her. Strange are the decrees of Providence. Mrs. Temple sighed as

she came downstairs again to where her old Captain sat gazing at the lamp with a sorrowful face. "Yes, my dear," he said as she came in, "you were right to say never mind the community. After all, I suppose there is no community in the world that has not its black sheep. Nobody will be so foolish as to confound *us* with such a fellow; but when I think of that poor girl——"

"That is what I have been thinking of," said Mrs. Temple; "but perhaps," she added, still unwilling to betray her interest in Lottie, that interest which was half opposition, "perhaps she may not feel it so much as we suppose."

"Feel it! I have not liked to say very much about her, my dear. She reminds me so of our own——and I know you could not bear to talk of that," said the good Captain, innocent of the fact that he had talked of little else for months past. "But if you only knew her better! There is something in her walk—in the turn of her head—that so reminds me—but I never liked to say much about it. You must not think she does not feel it. I met her and was talking with her just before I came for you. But for leaving you alone I should have taken her for a walk; it would have done her good. I believe she rushed off to the Slopes after all."

"I do *not think* she would get much good on the

Slopes," said Mrs. Temple, thinking of the little wind of gossip about Mr. Rollo Ridsdale which had begun to breathe about the Lodges.

"She would get fresh air—and quiet; she likes that; she is a very thoughtful girl, my dear—very serious, just like our own poor——. You must forgive me if I am always seeing resemblances. Lottie is very fond of the twilight. I have gone with her so often—know her tastes. Many a time I have done the same with——. When I feel her little arm in mine, I could almost think sometimes that other days have come back."

The shadow of Mrs. Temple's cap quivered on the wall. The thought of the little arm in his, the other days, which this simple touch brought back, was not sweet but terrible to her. A film floated before her eyes, and something choking and intolerable rose in her throat. "I do not suppose," she said hastily, "that a girl brought up like that can mind as one thinks."

The Captain shook his head. "I wish you knew her better," he said, with that soft answer which turns away irritation. The servant-maid came in with the tray at this moment, and Mrs. Temple began to pour out the tea. She was a little tired, having had many things to do that day, and it occurred to her suddenly that to lean back in her easy-chair as the Captain was doing, and to have her cup of tea brought

to her, would be sweet. To have some one to wait upon her tenderly and read her wishes in her eyes, and divine her thoughts before they came to her lips, that would be sweet. But could anyone do that except a child, could anything but love do it, and that sacred influence which is in the blood, the same blood running in the different veins of parent and child? These thoughts went through her mind without anybody being the wiser. She gave her husband his tea, and sat down in her turn to rest a little. There was nothing said in the still little room. The two together, did not they know all each other's thoughts and wishes and recollections? They were old, and what could happen to them except the going out to the Abbey, the coming in to tea? But if there had been three instead of two—and one young, with all a dawning world before her feet—everything would have borne a very different aspect. Ah! Mrs. Temple moved quickly, as she had the habit of doing when that recollection, always present to her mind, struck suddenly like a new blow. And here was a creature, helpless, forlorn, without a mother to fly to. The mother who had no child stood doubtful between earth and heaven, asking, speechless, what she was to do: pass by on the other side as if there was no mother in her? or pardon God for taking her child, and hold out her hand to His? She did *not know what* to do. Things were not easy

for her as for her husband. It was cruel of this girl even to live, to pass by a poor woman's windows who had lost her child; yet what was the woman to do when this creature who was living, who was an offence to her, was in trouble? Let her sink and never hold out a hand? But what then would the other girl in heaven think of her mother? Mrs. Temple was torn by this conflict of which she gave no sign, while perhaps the old Captain in his kind and simple heart, yearning over the young creature who was so helpless and desolate, was unjust to his wife and thought her less than kind.

And it was not only in Captain Temple's house that Polly's appearance was the cause of excitement. The Signor put his hand upon the arm of his young assistant as they went out together by the north door. "Did you see them?" he said, with meaning. Young Purcell was pale with excitement. He had done nothing but watch Polly promenading through the nave on her husband's arm, and the very fact of Lottie's superiority to himself made him feel with more horror the impossibility of any harmony between her and Polly, whom he considered so much inferior to himself. He had watched her from the organ-loft, while the Signor played the voluntary, with feelings indescribable; and so did his mother, who was also in the Abbey, and who gaped at the fine young woman with a mix-

ture of consternation and admiration, by no means sure of her inferiority, yet feeling that a crisis had arrived, and that whatever Miss Despard might have said before, she could not but be glad now of any offer of an 'ome. Mrs. Purcell did not stay for the voluntary, but went home quickly to see after "her dinner," very full of thought, and tremulous with expectation. The young lady was proud, she would not have anything to say to John before—but now, no doubt she would send for him and all would be settled. The housekeeper knew that a young stepmother was a strong argument against the peace of a girl who had been used to have everything her own way, and she felt with a tremor of her heart, half pride, half pain, that now at last she would have to resign her boy, and see him pass from beyond her ken into those regions of gentility with which the Signor's housekeeper had nothing to do. Very likely John, or John's wife who was "such a lady," would want her to leave her comfortable situation. Mrs. Purcell did not like the idea of it, but still, if it would help to make her boy happy—perhaps even it might remove a stumbling-block out of John's way if she were to take it into her own hands, and give up her situation. The thought made her heart heavy, for she liked her place, and the Signor, and her comfortable rooms, and the power of laying by a little money. But John was *the first* person to be considered. What

could a young lady object to in his position? *he* was all that a gentleman could wish to be; but a mother who was in service might no doubt be an objection. Mrs. Purcell made up her mind hurriedly, that if it proved needful she would not wait to be asked, but would herself take the initiative and make the sacrifice; but she did so with a heavy heart. To give up not only her boy, who, when he was married, would not she knew, be much more to his mother, but her occupation likewise, and her chief comforts, and her master who was, in a way, like another son to her, a foster-son, much greater and richer than she, but still dependent on her for his comfort—it was hard—but still she could do it for her John's sake. Meanwhile her John, feeling the Signor's hand heavy with meaning on his arm, answered with tremulous excitement, "Yes—— I saw it. It is terrible, terrible! a desecration. To think she should have to put up with *that* even for a day!"

"I wonder what will be the issue," said the Signor, meditatively. "Her heart is not in her work now. If she becomes an artist, it will be against her will—Art is not what she is thinking of. I wonder what will come of it. Will she feel the hollowness of this world and throw herself into her profession, or will she——"

"Master," said the young musician, fervently, "soone or later she will turn to me. It is not possible that

n could love a young lady as I do, and have an
ıe to offer her, as I have——"

Purcell was educated—he did not forget his h's in
eral; but how many people are there who, beguiled
that familiar phrase, forget all precautions, and
nge recklessly into the pitfall of an 'ome!

"You think so?" said the Signor. He did not
ıself put any confidence in this result, and was even
prised, after his recent experience, that the young
n should be sanguine; but still, after all, who ought
have such true intuitions as the hero himself? and
re is no telling what perseverance mingled with en-
ısiasm may do. The Signor was not satisfied with
pupil. She would not devote herself to her work
he wished. She had no abstract devotion to art, as
. The Signor felt, musing over it, that it was pos-
ıle she might take to it more warmly if by any
ance she became Purcell's wife. John was a very
od fellow, and when he was disappointed, the Signor
ıs very angry with Lottie; but, still, he thought it
ɔbable that Lottie, if she married him, would not
d much to satisfy her in Purcell, and, therefore,
uld be driven to art. And of all results that could
attained, was not this the best? In the meantime,
wever, he was very doubtful whether by this means
ever would be attained.

"Yes, master," *said* the young man; "how can I

help thinking so? I can give her, if not very much, at least independence and the comforts of an 'ome. She would not be dragged down by anything about me. My mother's position may be doubtful," he said, with passing embarrassment; "but you have been so good, you have never made her like a common servant, and at Sturminster nobody need ever know."

"Your mother has been very good, and done a great deal for you; you must never let anyone ignore your mother."

"Certainly not," said the young man. "She *is* my mother; that ought to be enough for anybody. And I shall have her come to see me the same as if she were a duchess; but, still, there is no need of publishing to everybody what she is when she is at home."

"That is true, that is true," said the Signor. "Then you really think there is a chance that this is how it will end?"

"Master," said Purcell, pausing at the door before they entered. It was one of the Italian traditions which had lingered in the Signor's habitual bearing, to stand still now and then as he was walking, by way of giving emphasis to a sentence. They paused now, looking at each other before they went in, and the colour came to the young fellow's face. "Master," he said, "it may look self-sufficient—but how can it end otherwise? There is no one else who will offer her what I can

offer her; and it would be like saying she had no sense, which is very far from the case, to think she would stand out for ever. She is a lady, she is above me in birth; but, thanks to you, I know how to behave like a gentleman; and surely, sooner or later, this is how it must end."

"Amen, with all my heart," said the Signor, turning in at the door, which old Pick held open behind, waiting, as one who knew his master's way.

It was Mr. Ashford who had intoned the service that afternoon, and his attention had been so caught by Polly's entrance that he had made a kind of stumble in the beginning—a pause which was perceptible. After that, during the singing of the anthem and at other moments when his attention was free, he had looked down upon that gorgeous apparition from his high desk with a look of compassion on his face. The compassion, it is needless to say, was not for Polly, who wanted none of it. He watched her behind his book, or behind the hand which supported his head, with the most curious alarmed attention. And when he passed her with her husband going out, Mr. Ashford looked at her in a way which Polly thought to be flattering. "That's one as takes an interest in us," she said. "It's Ashford, the Minor Canon. It must be you he takes an interest in," whispered the Captain, and Polly laughed and tossed her head. Mr. Ashford

went home with the same strange look on his face, softened, and touched, and pitiful. "Poor thing," he said to himself, "poor girl!" and when he got in he sat for a long time in the centre window, in the dark, looking out, and trying to think out some way of help. What could he do for her? Poor thing! with all her better instincts and higher feelings, with her impulse of taking care of everybody and keeping her father and brother right, what would become of her now? Mr. Ashford asked himself, with many an anxious thought, what could be done? A man could do nothing—where it was a girl that was in the case a man was more helpless than a baby. He could do nothing to help her; he could not even show his sympathy without probably doing more harm than good to the sufferer. He sat in the window-seat, gazing out on the dusk and the dim horizon, as if they could help him in his musings. If he had only had a mother or sister —any woman to whom he could have appealed, he thought he must have done so on behalf of this girl. But he had neither sister nor mother. He was a man very much alone in the world. He had a brother, a poor clergyman, with a large family, and a wife, who would not understand in the least why Ernest should interest himself in a stranger—*a girl*. If he wanted some one to spend his money upon, why not take one of the children? he thought he heard her say; and

tainly she would not understand, much less respond any appeal he could make to *her*. What could he ? If any other suggestion swept across Mr. Ash- d's face in the dark or through his heart, nobody s there to see or divine it. He sat thus without ging for his lamp till it was quite late, and was ich discomposed to be found sitting in the dark en a messenger arrived with a note from the Deanery out the extra service for the next saint's-day. He s annoyed to be found so, being conscious, perhaps, reasons for the vigil which he would not have cared enter upon; for he was shy and sensitive, and it had en happened to him to be laughed at, because of ; undue anxiety about others. "What is it to you?" d been often said to him, and never with more casion than now. For, after all, what did it matter the Minor Canon what became of Lottie Despard? hether she and her stepmother should "get on" to- ther, or if they should never "get on," but yet might nage to live under the same roof a cat-and-doggish e—what was it to him? One way or other, it would t take sixpence out of his pocket, or affect his com- t in any way. But yet he could not get it out of ; head. No one in the house had thought of coming his room to light his lamp, to see that all was in der for him. He was not served with precision, as is the Signor, *for he was* fond of saving his servants

trouble and making excuses for them. And when the man came from the Deanery and followed the maid into the study, where she went groping, declaring that her master was not at home, the Minor Canon was uncomfortable, finding himself thus taken by surprise. "You need not wait for an answer. I will send one in the morning," he said, when the candles on the writing-table had been lit with a match, and he had read the note. He felt that his confused and troubled thoughts might be read in his eyes. But nobody had any clue to the subject of these thinkings; and how could anyone suspect that it was a matter of such absolute indifference to himself that was occupying his thoughts—a thing with which he had nothing in the world to do?

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### WHAT ROLLO HAD TO MARRY ON.

THE moment after a man has made a proposal of marriage, and has been accepted, is not always a moment of unmitigated blessedness. There are ups and downs in the whole business from beginning to end. Sometimes the man has the best of it, and sometimes the woman. When either side has betrayed itself without a response on the other, when the man seems to waver in his privilege of choice, when the woman hesitates in her crowning prerogative of acceptance or rejection, then there are intervals on either side which are not enviable; but when all these preliminaries are over, and the explanation has been made, and the two understand each other—then the lady's position is, for the first few days at least, the most agreeable. She has no parents to interview, no pecuniary investigations to submit to, nor has she to enter upon the question of ways and means, settlements and income for the future. But when a man who knows he has nothing to marry upon is beguiled by circumstances, *by a* sudden emergency, or by strain

of feeling into the momentous offer, and, after the first enthusiasm of acceptance, looks himself in the face, as it were, and asks himself how it is to be done, there is something terrible in the hours that follow. How was it to be done? Rollo Ridsdale left Lottie at her door, and went across the road towards the Deanery in a state of mind which was indescribable. He was not an immaculate man, nor had he now spoken of love, for the first time; but yet he was real in his love, and the response had been sweet to him—sweet and terrible, as conveying every risk and danger that life could bring, as well as every delight. He had lingered with his love until the last available moment, and yet it was a relief to turn his back upon her, to go away into the chaos of his own life and try to find a way out of this maze in which he had involved himself. How was he to marry? what was he to do? He felt giddy as he walked along, steadily enough to outward seeming, but in his soul groping like a blind man. He had asked Lottie Despard to marry him, and she had consented. He wanted nothing better than her companionship, her love, the delight and comfort of her to be his own; but, good heavens!—but, by Jove! —but, in the name of everything worth swearing by—how was it to be done?—how was he to marry? what was he to do? The happiness was delicious—it was a taste of Paradise, a whiff of Elysium—but——.

Rollo did not know where he was going as he crossed the Dean's Walk. He went—steadily enough, his legs carrying him, his knowledge of the place guiding him mechanically, but his whole soul in a maze of thought. How was he to do it? How could he, a man with nothing, not much better than an adventurer, living upon chances and windfalls—how could he weight himself with the support of another—marry a wife? It was preposterous, it was terrible—yet it was sweet. Poor child, she was in want of his arm to shelter her, in want of some one to take care of her, and he could not tolerate the idea that anyone but himself should give her the succour she needed; but how was he to do it? The question seemed to get into the air and whisper round him—how was he to do it? He had nothing, or what to such a man was nothing, and worse than nothing. He managed to live no one could tell how. True, in living he did not know how Rollo managed to spend a good deal of money—more than many a family is reared upon; but there is proportion in everything, and he never could tell from one year's end to another how he had got through. And he had asked a girl to marry him! He groaned within himself when he came back to this centre thought, this pivot of all his reflections, though it was sweet. He had asked her to marry him; he had pledged himself to take her away out of her troubles,

to throw open a refuge to her, to make her escape practicable: speedily, certainly, easily, so far as she knew—and how was he to do it? If the question went through his mind once, it flew and circled in wavering rounds about him, like a moth or a bat in summer, a hundred times at least as he went from the Chevalier's lodge to the Deanery door. He had no time for thinking, since the hour of dinner approached, and the Dean waited for no one; but he thought and thought all the same. What was he to do? He marry! how was he to do it? Yet it must be done. He did nothing but ask himself this while he brushed his hair and tied his evening tie. He had nothing, not a penny—he had a valet and a dressing-case, with gold tops to all the bottles, and the most expensive clothes from the dearest tailor—but he had nothing, and everybody knew that he had nothing. The situation was appalling. A cold dew came out on his forehead; he to do such a thing! but yet he had done it —he had committed himself—and now the question that remained was—not how to get out of it, which under any other circumstances would have been his clear duty, but how to do it? This was the problem he tried to solve while he was dressing, which flitted about his head while he sat at dinner, between every mouthful of his soup, and fluttered all through the dessert. How was he to do it? And when the even-

ing was over—when Lady Caroline had gone to bed, and the Dean to his study, Rollo at length ventured out into the Deanery garden with his cigar, in spite of the black looks of Mr. Jeremie, who wanted to shut up the house and get to bed himself at a reasonable hour, as a dean's butler has a right to do.

It was cold—but he did not feel the cold—and the wind was still strong, blowing the black branches wildly about the leaden sky. The Dean's garden was bounded by the Slopes, only a low and massive grey wall, as old as the buttresses amid which the lawn was set, separating it from the larger grounds, which were open to the community—and Rollo leaning on that wall could almost see the spot where he had sat with Lottie, when she had clasped her hands on his arm, leaning upon him with delicious trust, and giving up all her future into his hands. Even then what a difference there had been between them!—she throwing herself upon him in utter faith and confidence, feeling herself delivered completely and at once from all the troubles that overwhelmed her; while he, even in the thrill of pleasure which that soft weight and pressure gave him, felt his heart jump with such sudden alarm as words could not describe. Now, when he thought it over, the alarm was more than the pleasure. Lottie, retired into her little chamber, was at that hour going over the whole scene with the tenderest happiness and

reliance—feeling safe with him, feeling free of all responsibility, not even forecasting the future, safe and relieved from all the anxieties of the past, caring for nothing but this moment, this exquisite climax of life, this perfect union that had begun and was never to end. Very, very different were Rollo's thoughts. How was he to do it? Marry! the very idea seemed impossible. It involved disclosure, and disclosure would be madness. What would his relations say to him?—what would his friends say to him? His tradesmen would send in their bills, his associates would contemplate him with the very horror of astonishment. Ridsdale married! as well cut his throat at once. Had he ever thought of the little *ménage* on which Lottie's thoughts (had they been free to plan anything) would have dwelt with simple pride and happiness, he would have been disposed really to cut his throat. In such a case Lottie would have been sure of her own powers—sure that if they were poor she could make their money go twice as far as Rollo by himself could make it go—and could much more than balance her share of the expenses by the housewifely powers which would have been her delight and her ambition to exercise. But to Rollo love in a cottage was a sinful folly, meaning nothing. The very idea was so foreign to him that it never entered into his mind at all. What did enter into his mind, as the only hope in

blank of the future, was of a very different description. It was the original idea which had first of all moved him towards this girl, who gradually had awakened within him so many other sentiments: her voice. Should he be able to produce this as he hoped, then there would be a way of escape from the difficulty. The Manager had behaved like a fool, but Rollo had not changed his opinion. Though he had fallen in love with the singer, and his sentiments in regard to her had thus been modified, he had never changed his opinion. She possessed a magnificent organ; and though (which seemed to him very strange) Handel at present was her only inspiration, yet he felt that with proper care that voice could do anything, and that in it might yet lie all the elements of fortune. Casting about around all his horizon for something like salvation, this was the only light that Rollo perceived. It, perhaps, was not the most desirable of lights. To marry a singer in full heyday of her powers, admired by all the world, and making a great deal of money, was not a thing that any younger son would hesitate to do; but an unknown singer, with all her way to make, and her very education still so imperfect, that was a very different matter; but still it was the only chance. In former times, perhaps, a man would have thought it necessary to pretend at least a desire to snatch his bride *from* the exposure of publicity, from

the stage, or even from the concert-room—a determination to work for her rather than to let her work for him; but along with circumstances sentiments change, and the desire of women for work is apt to be supported from an undesirable side by those who once would have thought their honour concerned in making women's work unnecessary. In civilisation there can be no advance without its attendant drawback. Mr. Ridsdale had fallen in love, a thing no young man can entirely guard against, and he had engaged to marry Lottie Despard, partly because he was in love with her, partly because she was in want of protection and succour. But he did not know in what way he could keep a wife; and short of breaking his word and abandoning her altogether (things which at this moment it seemed utterly impossible to do), what other way was open to him than to consider how his wife could keep him? This was a great deal more easy. He had nothing—no money, no profession—but she had a profession, a something which was worth a great deal of money, which only required cultivation to be as good as a fortune. Rollo's heart perceptibly lightened as he thought of this. It did not make the social difficulties much easier, or soften the troubles which he must inevitably have with his family; but still, whereas the other matter had been impossible, *this* brought it within the range of things that could

be contemplated. He could not refrain from one sigh (in the undercurrent of his mind—not dwelt upon or even acknowledged, a thing which he would have been ashamed of had he admitted it to himself)—one sigh that the idea of marriage had come in at all. She might have found in him all the succour, all the companionship, all the support she wanted without *that;* and it would have done her no harm in her after career. But that was a secret thought—an inadvertence, a thing which he dared not permit himself to think, as it were, in the daylight, in his own full knowledge. He knew very well what a fool he would appear to everybody—how the idea that he, Rollo, with all his experience, should be thus taken in at last, would cause infinite surprise and laughter among his friends —but still there came a gleam of possibility into the matter when he thought of Lottie's gift. By that means they might do it. It was not quite out of the question, quite impossible. Rollo had been so lost in thought that he had not seen Mr. Jeremie looking out from the window through which he had gone into the garden; but as he arrived at this, which was a kind of conclusion, if not a very satisfactory one, he became at last aware of the respectable butler's anxiety.

"Her ladyship, sir, don't hold with leaving the windows open," said Mr. Jeremie, who did not hold with staying out of bed to attend upon a young man's

vagaries. There had been nothing of this kind in Miss Augusta's time—not even when Mr. Daventry came courting. Rollo tossed the end of his cigar over the wall and came in, somewhat relieved in his mind, though the relief was not very great. It left all the immediate question unsolved—what his family would say, and what was to be done in the meantime—but it gave a feeble light of possibility in the future. He had calculated on Lottie's voice to make his fortune when he thought of it only as a speculator. He had much more right to look upon her as likely to make his fortune now.

In the morning the same thought was the first in Rollo's mind; but the faint light of hope it gave was surrounded by clouds that were full of trouble. Supposing that in the course of time, when she was thoroughly established in her profession, trained and started, she could manage to attain that most necessary thing called an income, with which to meet the world —this was a contingency which still lay in the future; whereas it might be necessary to act at once. The very urgency and anxiety of Rollo's thoughts will show that he neither wanted to abandon Lottie nor to allow her to guess that he was alarmed by his engagement to her. The whole scope and object of his deliberations was to make the thing possible. But for this why should he have troubled himself about it at

ll? He might have "let things take their course"—
e might have gone on enjoying the delights of love-
naking, and all a lover's privileges, without going any
rther. Lottie was not the kind of girl who ever
ould have hurried matters, or insisted upon the
ngagement being kept. He knew well enough that
he would never "pull him up." But he was in love
ith Lottie — he wanted to deliver her from her
oubles—he wanted to have her for his own—if he
ould only see how it was to be done. Evidently
here were various conditions which must be insisted
n—which Lottie must yield to. Public notice must
ot be called to the tie between them more than was
bsolutely necessary. Everything must be conducted
arefully and privately—not to make any scandal—
nd not to compel the attention of his noble family.
ollo did not want to be sent for by his father, to be
monstrated with by his elder brother, to have all
is relatives preaching sermons to him. Even his
unt Caroline, passive, easy-going soul — even she
ould be roused, he felt, to violence, could she divine
hat was in the air. Marry Miss Despard! the idea
ould drive her out of all the senses she possessed.
Kind as she was, and calm as she was, Rollo felt that
1 such circumstances she would no longer be either
ind or calm; and if even Lady Caroline were driven
) bay, what *would be* the effect of such a step on

Lord Courtland, who had no calm of nature w[illegible] which to meet the revelation? Therefore his he[illegible] was heavy as he went out, as soon as the bells [illegible] ceased ringing for matins, to meet his love on th[illegible] Slopes. His heart was heavy, yet he was not a cool or indifferent lover. The thought of seeing her again was sweet to him; but the cares were many, and he did not know how to put into language which would not vex or hurt her the things that must be said. He tried to wrap them up in honeyed words, but he was not very successful; and at last he decided to leave it all to Providence—to take no thought for what he was to say. "The words will be put into my mouth at the right time," he said to himself piously. He could not exactly forecast what shape the conversation might take, or how this special subject should be introduced. He would not settle what he had to say, but would leave it to fate.

The morning sunshine lay as usual unbroken upon the Dean's Walk. It had been feeble and fitful in the morning, as sunshine has often begun to be in October, but now had warmed into riper glory. The paths on the Slopes were strewed with fallen leaves, which the winds of last night had blown about in clouds. Rollo was first at the trysting-place; and when he saw Lottie appear suddenly round the bole of the big elm-tree, she seemed to be walking to him,

er foot all light and noiseless, upon a path of gold. [er steps seemed to have a fairy tinkle upon that ellow pavement. The movement of her figure was ke music, with a flowing liquid measure in it. The ttle veil that dropped over her hat, the ribbons at er neck, the soft sweep of her dark merino gown, ommonest yet prettiest of fabrics, all united in one ɔft line. There was nobody by, and it was the first eavenly morning upon which they had belonged to ıch other. She came to him as if out of paradise, ıt of heaven, all radiant with happiness and celestial ust and love. A glow of tenderness and gladness ıme over the young man. He forgot all about the ifficulties, about money, about his family, about how ıey were to live and what was to be done. He went ɔ meet her, ardent and eager, forgetting everything ıt herself. It was the *vita nuova* all over again—a ew earth and new skies. It seemed to both of them ıat they had never lived before, that this was the irthday of a glorified existence. Even last night, in ıe agitation of their happiness, had not been like ıis first new day. When they stepped into each :her's sight, realising the mutual property, the mutual ght, the incomprehensible sweetness of belonging to ıch other, everything else seemed to be swept out of ıe world. There was nothing visible but themselves, ıe sweet sky, and genial air: the leaves dropping

softly, all crimson and golden, the sun shining on them with a sympathetic surprise of pleasure. For the moment, even to the young man of the world, everything was simple, primitive, and true, all complication and conventionalities swept away; and if so to Rollo, how much more to Lottie, thus advancing sweetly, with a soft measure in her step, not hurried or eager, but in modest faith and innocence, into her lover's arms!

And, lo! in a moment all his calculations proved needless. Instead of talking seriously to each other, making their mutual arrangements, deciding what was to be done, as would have been far the wisest way of employing the solitude of this sweet morning, which seemed to brighten expressly for them—what did the two do but fall into an aimless delicious whispering about their two happy selves, and nothing more! They had things to say to each other which came by stress of nature, and had to be said, yet were nothing — while the things of real importance were thrust aside. They fell a-gossiping about themselves, about each other, going over all the old ground, repeating the last evening's tender follies, about—when you first began to think—and when I first knew—and what had been in the one heart and in the other, when both had to talk of other things, and make no sign. What need to follow all the course of that foolishness?

here was nothing in earth or heaven so deeply nteresting to Lottie as to hear how Rollo was thinking f her while he stood and talked to somebody else, atching her from far; and how his heart would beat hen he saw her coming, and how he blasphemed ld Captain Temple, yet blessed him next moment for inging her here; and what he had really meant hen he said this and that, which had perplexed her t the time; nor to Rollo than to know how she had atched for him, and looked for his sympathy, and lt herself backed up and supported the moment he peared. There was not a day of the past month ut had its secret history, which each longed to disose to the other—and scarcely an hour, scarcely a rap of conversation which did not contain a world of nrevealed meaning to be unfolded and interpreted. alk of an hour! they had ample enough material for century without being exhausted; and as for arrangeents, as for the (so to speak) business of the matter, ho thought of it? For Lottie was not an intelligent oung woman, intending to be married, but a happy irl in love; and Rollo, though he knew better, was in ve too, and wished for nothing better than these elightful confidences. The hours went by like a oment. They had already been aroused two or ree times by the roll of baby carriages propelled by ursemaids before the greater volume of music from

the Abbey proclaimed that service was over. "Already!" they both cried, with wonder and dismay; and then, for the first time, there was a pause.

"I had so much to talk to you about," he said, "and we have not had time to say a word, have we? Ah! when can we have a good long time to ourselves? Can you escape your Captain to-night, my darling? I should like to shake him by the hand, to thank him for taking care of you; but couldn't you escape from him, my Lottie, to-night?"

Lottie grew a little pale; her heart sank, not with distrust, but with perhaps a little, a very little disappointment. Was this still how it was to be? Just the same anxious diplomacies to secure a meeting, the same risks and chances? This gave her a momentary chill. "It is very difficult," she said. "He is the only one I have to take care of me. He would think it unkind."

"You must not say now the only one, my Lottie —not the only one—my substitute for a little while, who will soon have to give me up his place."

"But he will not like to give it up now; not till he knows; perhaps not even then—for his daughter, you know——"

"Ah! it was she who married Dropmore. Lottie, my love, my darling, I cannot live through the evening without you. Could you not come again, at the same

: as last night? It is early dark, heaven be praised. e your walk with him, and then give him the slip, come here, sweet, here to me. I shall be watch- counting the moments. It is bad enough to be ged to get through the day without you. Ah! it is Signor's day. The Signor is all rapt up in his ic. He will never suspect anything. I shall be to see you at least, to hear you, to look at you, lovely darling——"

After a moment said Lottie, "That was one thing nted to ask you about. You know why the Signor s me lessons. Will it be right *now* to go on with ? *now* that everything is changed? Should not I them up?"

"Give them up!" cried Rollo, with a look of dis- . "My darling, what are you thinking of? They more necessary, more important than ever. Of se, we will pay for them after. Oh! no fear but will be repaid; but no, no, my love, my sweet, you t not give them up!"

She looked at him with something like anxiety in eyes, not knowing what he could mean. What was Lottie could not but feel a little disappointed. It ned that everything was to go on just the same as re.

"I shall see you there," he said. "So long as we in the same place everything is sweet; and I have

always taken so much interest in your dear voice that no one can suspect. And to-night you will come—promise me, my darling—just after the service, when it is getting dark?"

"Yes," she whispered, with a sigh—then started from his side. "I saw some one among the trees. The old Chevaliers are coming up for their morning walk. Let me go now—you must let me go—Mr. Ridsdale——"

"'Mr. Ridsdale!' How can I let my Lottie go before she has called me by my right name?"

"Oh, I must not stay. I see people coming," said Lottie, disappointed, troubled, afraid of being seen, yet angry with herself for being afraid. "Mr. Ridsdale—Rollo, dear Rollo—let me go now——"

"Till it is time for the Signor——" And he *did* let her go, with a hasty withdrawal on his own part, for unmistakably there were people to be seen moving about among the trees; not, indeed, coming near their corner, yet within sight of them. Lottie left him hurriedly, not looking back. She was ashamed, though she had no cause for shame. She ran down the bank to the little path which led to the foot of the hill and to the town. She could not go up and run the risk of being seen going home by the Dean's Walk. She drew her veil over her face, and her cheeks burned with blushes; she was ashamed, though she had done

no wrong. And Rollo stood looking down after her, watching her with a still more acute pang. There were things which were very painful to him which did not affect her. That a girl like Lottie should go away alone, unattended, and walk through the street, with no one with her, a long round, annoyed him beyond measure. He ought to have gone with her, or some one ought to be with her. But then, what could he do? He might as well give up the whole matter at once as betray all he was meditating to his people in this way. But he watched her, leaning over the low parapet, with trouble and shame. The girl whom he loved ought not to go about unattended, and this relic of chivalry, fallen into conventionality, moved him more than greater things. He did not object, like Ferdinand, to let his Miranda carry his load for him; but it did trouble him that she should walk through St. Michael's by herself, though in the sweet security of the honest morning. Thus minds differ all over the world.

END OF VOL. II.

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# WITHIN THE PRECINCTS

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1879.

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# WITHIN THE PRECINCTS.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### LOTTIE'S SIDE OF THE QUESTION.

Lottie made her way down the Slopes alone, with :elings which had greatly changed from those of a :w minutes ago. How happy she had been! The our that had passed under the falling leaves had been ke paradise; but the portals of exit from paradise are erhaps never so sweet as those of entrance. Her oming away was with a sense of humiliation and ame. As she wound her way down her favourite r-road winding among the shrubs and trees, she could ot help feeling that she was making her escape, as if om some guilty meeting, some clandestine rendezvous.

all her life Lottie had never known this sensation fore. She had been shy, and had shrunk from the ze of people who had stared at her, in admiration her beauty or of her singing, but in her shyness ere had always been the pride of innocence; and ver before *had she* been afraid to meet any eye, or

felt it necessary to steal away, to keep out of sight
if she were guilty. She had not done anything wro[illegible]g,
but yet she had all the feeling of having done so[illegible]e-
thing wrong—the desire to escape, the horror of det[illegible]ec-
tion. To some the secret meeting, the romance and
mystery, would have been only an additional happi-
ness, but Lottie, proud and frank and open-hearted,
could not bear the very thought of doing anything of
which she was ashamed. The sensation hurt and
humiliated her. All had been very different *before:* to
meet her lover unawares, yet not without intention, with
a delightful element of chance in each encounter—to
look out secretly for him, yet wonder innocently to
find him—to let her steps be drawn here or there b
a sense of his presence, with a fond pretence of avoi
ing him, a sweet certainty of meeting him—all th
risks and hazards of emotion had been natural.
Lottie felt with a sudden jar of her nerves and
that this ought not to continue so. She had
little wondering disappointment on the previou
when he had asked her to meet him again,
any suggestion that he should go to her, or
new bond between them known. Even then
been a faint jar, a sigh of unfulfilled expect
now their hurried parting, her own flight
panic lest they should be seen, and disc
made Lottie's heart sick. How well she c

this ought to have been! They ought not to have from each other, or been afraid of any man's eye. ıght not to have mattered whether the Signor or ıne suspected. Blushing and shy, yet with full in the sympathy of all who saw her, Lottie should walked down the Dean's Walk with her betrothed: should have avoided no one. She should have shamefaced but not ashamed. What a difference ween the two! all the difference that there is be- n the soft blush of happiness and the miserable ing of guilt. And this was what ought to have . Half the misery of Lottie—as half the misery ll imaginative inexperienced women—arose from pain and disappointment of feeling that those she l did not come up to the ideal standard she had ıp in her soul. She was disappointed, not so much use of the false position in which she herself was ɜd (for this, except instinctively, she had but little ɜed), but because Rollo was not doing, not yet, all it seemed right for him to do. She would have d and beaten (had she been able) Law into the ment of his duty, she would even have made him rous to herself, not for the sake of herself, but he should be a model of brotherhood, an example l a true man ought to be; and if this was so in case of her brother, how much more with her ? If to be harsh as a tyrant or indifferent as a

sultan, was the highest ideal of a man's conduct, how much happier many a poor creature would be! It seems a paradox to say so, but it is true enough; for the worst of all, in a woman's mind, is to feel that the wrong done to *her* is worse wrong to *him*, an infringement of the glory of the being whom she would fain see perfect. This, however, is a mystery beyond the comprehension of the crowd. Lottie was used to being disappointed with Law—was she fated to another disappointment more cruel and bitter? She did not ask herself the question, she would not have thought it even, much less said it for all the world; but secretly there was a wonder, a pang, a faintness of failure in her heart.

It is not without an effort, however, that the heart will permanently admit any such disappointment. As Lottie went her ways thus drooping, ashamed and discouraged, thinking of everything that had been done and that ought to have been done, there drifted vaguely across her mind a kind of picture of Rollo's meeting with her father, and what it would be. She had no sooner thought of this than a glow of alarm came over her face, bringing insensibly consolation to her mind. Rollo and her father! What would the Captain say to him? He would put on his grand air, in which even Lottie had no faith; he would exhibit himself in all his vain greatness, in all his self-importance, jaunty

and fine, to his future son-in-law. He would give Lottie herself a word of commendation in passing, and he would spread himself forth before the stranger as if it was he whom Rollo wanted and cared for. Lottie's steps quickened out of the languid pace into which they had fallen, and her very forehead grew crimson as she realised that meeting. Thank heaven, it had not taken place yet! Rollo had been too wise, too kind, too delicate to humble his love by hurrying into the presence of the Captain, into the house where the Captain's new wife now reigned supreme. The new wife—she too would have a share in it, she would be called into counsel, she would give her advice in everything, and claim a right to interfere. Oh, Lottie thought, how foolish she had been! how much wiser was Rollo, no doubt casting about in his mind how it was best to be done, and pondering over it carefully to spare her pain. She felt herself enveloped in one blush from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet; but how sweet was that shame! It was she who was foolish, not he who had failed. Her cheeks burned with a penitential flush, but he was faultless. There was nothing in him to disappoint, but only the most delicate kindness, the tenderest care of her. How could she have thought otherwise? It was not possible that Rollo should like secret meetings, should fear discovery. In the first days of their acquaintance he had shown no

reluctance to come to the humble little lodge. But now —his finer feeling shrank from it now—he wanted to take his love away from that desecrated place, not to shame her by prying into its ignoble mysteries. He was wiser, better, kinder than anyone. And she was ashamed of *herself*, not any longer of anything else, ashamed of her poor, mean, unworthy interpretation of him; and as happy in her new, changed consciousness of guilt, and penitence and self-disgust—as happy as if, after her downfall into earth, she had now safely got back into heaven.

By this time she had got out of the wooded Slopes, and over the stile, and into the steep thoroughfare at the foot of the Abbey walls, the pavement of St. Michael's Hill. Lottie did not feel that there was any harm in walking through the street alone, as Rollo thought there was. She wanted no attendant. A little body-guard, invisible, but with a radiance going out from them which shone about her, attended upon her way —love and innocence and happiness, no longer with drooping heads but brave and sweet, a band invisible, guaranteeing their charge against all ills. As she went along the street with this shining retinue, there was nothing in all the world that could have harmed her; and nobody wanted to harm the girl—of whom, but *that* she was proud, no soul in St. Michael's had an unkind word to say. Everybody knew the domestic

ouble that had come upon her, and all the town was orry for Lottie—all the more that there was perhaps human satisfaction in being sorry for one whose fault as that she was proud. She met Captain Temple as ie entered the Abbey Gate. Many thoughts about er had been in the kind old man's heart all the iorning, and it was partly to look for her, after vain alks about the Abbey Precincts, that he was turning is steps towards the town. He came up to her eagerly, iking her hand between his. He thought she must ave been wandering out disconsolate, no matter where, ) get away from the house which was no longer a fit ome for one like her. He was so disturbed and nxious about her, that the shadow which was in his ind seemed to darken over Lottie, and cast a reflec- on of gloom upon her face. "You have been out rly, my dear? Why did you not send for me to go ith you? After matins I am always at your service," e said.

But there was none of the gloom which Captain emple imagined in Lottie's face. She looked up at m out of the soft mist of her own musings with a nile. "I went out before matins," she said; "I have een out a long time. I had—something to do."

"My poor child! I fear you have been wandering, eeping out of the way," said the old Captain. Then iother thought seized him. Had she begun already

to serve the new wife and do her errands? "My dear," he said, "what have you been doing? you must not be too good—you must not forget yourself too much. Your duty to your father is one thing, but you must not let yourself be made use of now—you must recollect your own position, my dear."

"My position?" she looked up at him bewildered; for she was thinking only of Rollo, while he thought only of her father's wife.

"Yes, Lottie, my dear child, you have thought only of your duty hitherto, but you must not yield to every encroachment. You must not allow it to be supposed that you give up everything."

"Ah," said Lottie, lifting to him eyes which seemed to swim in a haze of light; "to give up everything would be so—— I don't know what you mean," she added hastily, in a half-terrified tone. As for Captain Temple, he was quite bewildered, and did not know what to think.

"Need I explain, my dear, what I mean? There can be but one thing that all your friends are thinking of. This new relation, this new connection. I could not sleep all night for thinking of you, in the house with that woman. My poor child! and my wife too. You were the last thing we talked of at night, the first thing in the morning——"

"Ah," said Lottie again, coming back to reality

with a long-drawn breath. "I was not thinking of her; but I understand you now."

Lottie had, however, some difficulty in thinking of *her*, even now; for one moment, being thus recalled to the idea, her countenance changed; but soon came back to its original expression. Her eyes were dewy and sweet—a suspicion of tears in them like the morning dew on flowers with the sunshine reflected in it, the long eyelashes moist, but the blue beneath as clear as a summer sky; and the corners of her mouth would run into curves of smiling unawares; her face was not the face of one upon whom the cares of the world were lying heavy, but of one to whom some new happiness had come. She was not thinking of what he was saying, but of something in her own mind. The kind old Captain could not tell what to think; he was alarmed, though he did not know why.

"Then it is not so bad," he said, "as you feared?"

"What is not so bad? Things at home? Oh, Captain Temple! But I try not to think about it," Lottie said hastily, with a quiver in her lip. She looked at him wistfully, with a sudden longing. "I wish—I wish —but it is better not to say anything."

"You may trust to me, my dear; whatever is in your heart I will never betray you; you may trust to me."

Lottie's eyes filled with tears as she looked at him,

but she shook her head. They were not bitter tears, only a little bitter-sweet of happiness that wanted expression, but which she dared not reveal. If she could but have told him! If Rollo, failing her father, would but come and speak to this kind and true friend! But she shook her head. She was no longer free to say and do whatever pleased her out of her own heart. She must think of *him;* and while he did not speak, what could she say? She put out her hand to her old friend again with a little sudden artifice unlike Lottie. "I have been out all the morning," she said; "I must make haste and get back now."

"I am very glad you are not unhappy," said the old Captain, looking at her regretfully. He was not quite sincere. To tell the truth it gave him a shock to find that Lottie was not unhappy; how could she put up with such a companion, with such a fate? He went in to his wife, who had been watching furtively at the window while this conversation was going on, to talk it all over. Mrs. Temple was almost glad to find something below perfection in the girl about whom secretly she thought as much as her husband talked. "We have been thinking too much about it," she said; "if she can find the stepmother congenial, it will be better for her."

"Congenial! you are talking folly. How could she be congenial?" cried Captain Temple, with great heat,

but he did not know what to make of it. He was disappointed in Lottie. When he had met her the day before she had been quivering with pain and shame, revolted and outraged, as it was right and natural she should be: but now it seemed to have passed altogether from her mind. He could not make it out. He was disappointed; he went on talking of this wonder all day long and shaking his white head.

As for Lottie, when she went home, she passed through the house, light and silent as a ghost, to her own little room, where, abstracted from everything else, she could live in the new little world of her own which had come out of the mists into such sudden and beautiful life. It was very unlike Lottie, but what more does the young soul want when the *vita nuova* has just begun, but such a possibility of self-abstraction and freedom to pursue its dreams? Rapt in these, she gave up her occupation, her charge, without a sigh. When she was called to table she came quite gently, and took no notice of anything that passed there, having enough in her own mind to keep her busy. Law was as much astonished as Captain Temple. He had thought that Lottie would not endure it for a day; but, thanks to that happy preoccupation, Lottie sailed serenely through these troubled waters for more than a week, during which she spent a considerable portion of her time on the Slopes, though the weather

grew colder and colder every day, and the rest in her own room, in which she sat fireless, doing her accustomed needlework, her darnings and mendings, mechanically, while Polly remodelled the drawing-room, covering it up with crocheted antimacassars, and all the cheap and coarse devices of vulgar upholstery. While this was going on, she too was content to have Lottie out of the way. Polly pervaded the house with high-pitched voice and noisy step; and she filled it with savoury odours, giving the two men hot suppers, instead of poor Lottie's cold beef, which they had often found monotonous. The Captain now came in for this meal, which in former times he had rarely favoured; he spent the evenings chiefly at home, having not yet dropped out of the fervour of the honeymoon; and on the whole even Law was not sure that there was not something to be said for the new administration of the house. There was no cold beef—that was an improvement patent to the meanest capacity. As for Polly, nothing had yet occurred to mar her glory and happiness. She wore her blue silk every day, she walked gloriously about the streets in her orange-blossoms, pointed out by everybody as one of the ladies of the Abbey. She went to the afternoon service and sat in her privileged seat, and looked down with dignified sweetness upon "the girls" who were as she once was. She felt herself as a goddess,

sitting there in the elevated place to which she had a right, and it seemed to her that to be a Chevalier's wife was as grand as to be a princess. But Polly did not soil her lips with so vulgar a word as wife. She called herself a Chevalier's lady, and her opinion of her class was great. "Chevalier means the same thing as knight, and, instead of being simple missis, I am sure we should all be My lady," Polly said, "if we had our rights." Even her husband laughed, but this did not change her opinion. It was ungrateful of the other Chevaliers' ladies that they took no notice of this new champion of their order. But for the moment Polly, in the elation of her success, did not mind this, and was content to wait for the recognition which sooner or later she felt would be sure to come.

This elation kept her from interfering with Lottie, whose self-absorbed life in her own room, and her exits and entrances, Mrs. Despard tolerated and seemed to accept as natural; she had so many things to occupy and to please her, that she could afford to let her step-daughter alone. And thus Lottie pursued for a little time that life out of nature to which she had been driven. She lived in those moments on the Slopes, and in the hours she spent at the Signor's piano, singing; and then brooded over these intervals of life in the silence. Her lessons had increased to three in the week, and these hours of so-called study

were each like a drama of intense and curious interest. Rollo was always there—a fact which he explained to the Signor by his professional interest in the new singer, and which to Lottie required no explanation; and there too was her humble lover, young Purcell, who as she grew familiar with the sight of him, and showed no displeasure at his appearance, grew daily a little more courageous, sometimes daring to turn the leaves of the music, and even to speak to her. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who sat by, watching them all with lively but not extravagant interest, was the only one in the little party who was not more or less excited. As for Lottie, this lesson was the centre of all her life. If music be the food of love, love was the very inspiration of music to her; the two re-acted upon each other, raising her to such a height of primitive heroic passion as nobody near her divined—as nobody, in deed, except perhaps the Signor, with his Italia susceptibility, was capable of divining. He saw i deed with dissatisfaction, with an interest which w almost angry, that it was not art that moved her, a that the secret of the astonishing progress she ma was not in his instructions. What was it? The Si was angry, for he felt no certainty that this wond progress was real. Something made her sing lik angel. What was it? not art. The natural qua of her voice were not to be gainsayed; but the mu

felt that the training under which she seemed to be advancing visibly, was all fictitious, and that it was something else that inspired her. But Rollo had no such enlightenment. He remarked with all the technicality of an amateur how her high notes gained in clearness, and her low notes in melody, at every new effort. It was wonderful; but then the Signor was a wonderful teacher, a wonderful accompanyist, and what so natural as that a creature of genius like this, should grow under his teaching like a flower? Though it was to him she sang, and though her love for him was her inspiration, Rollo was as unaware of this as old Pickering in the hall, who listened and shook his head, and decided in his heart that a woman with a voice like that was a deal too grand for Mr. John. "She's more like Jenny Lind than anything," old Pick said; and in this Mr. Ridsdale agreed, as he sat and listened, and thought over the means which should be employed to secure her success. As for young Purcell, he stood entranced and turned over the leaves of the music. Should he ever dare to speak to her again, to offer her his love, as he had once ventured to do,—she who seemed born to enthral the whole world? But then, the young fellow thought, who was there but he who had an 'ome to offer Lottie? He was the nobler of the two between whom she stood, the two men who loved *her: all his thought* was, that she being un-

happy, poor, her father's house made wretched to her, he had an 'ome to offer her; whereas Rollo thought of nothing but of the success she must achieve in which he would have his share. In order to achieve that success Rollo had no mind to lend her even his name; but the idea that it was a thing certain, comforted him much in the consciousness of his own imprudent engagement, and gave a kind of sanction to his love. To marry a woman with such a faculty for earning money could not be called entirely imprudent. These were the calculations, generous and the reverse, which were made about her. Only Lottie herself made no calculations, but sang out of the fulness of her heart, and the delicate passion that possessed her; and the Signor stood and watched, dissatisfied, sympathetic, the only one that understood at all, though he but poorly, the high emotion and spring-tide of life which produced that flood of song.

In this highly-strained unnatural way, life went on amid this little group of people, few of whom were conscious of any volcano under their feet. It went on day by day, and they neither perceived the gathering rapidity of movement in the events, nor any other sign that to-day should not be as yesterday. Shortly after the explanation had taken place between Rollo and Lottie, Augusta Huntington, now Mrs. Daventry, arrived upon her first visit home. She was the Dean's

only child, and naturally every honour was done to her. All the country round, everyone that was of sufficient importance to meet the Dean's daughter, was invited to hail her return. The Dean himself took the matter in hand to see that no one was overlooked. They would all like, he thought, to see Augusta, the princess royal of the reigning house; and Augusta was graciously pleased to like it too. One of these entertainments ended in a great musical party, to which all who had known Miss Huntington, all the singers in the madrigals and choruses of which she had been so fond, were asked. When Lottie's invitation came, there was a great thrill and commotion in Captain Despard's house. Lottie did not even suspect the feeling which had been roused on the subject when she took out her white muslin dress, now, alas, no longer so fresh as at first, and inspected it anxiously. It would do still with judicious ironing, but what must she do for ornaments, now that roses were no longer to be had? This troubled Lottie's mind greatly, though it may be thought a frivolous question, until a few hours before the time, when two different presents came for her, of flowers: one being a large and elaborate bouquet, the other a bunch of late roses, delicate, lovely, half-opened buds, which could only have come out of some conservatory. One of these was from Rollo, and who could doubt which it was? Who but

he would have remembered her sole decoration, and found for her in winter those ornaments of June? What did she care who sent the other? She decked herself with her roses, in a glow of grateful tenderness, as proud as she was happy, to find herself thus provided by his delicate care and forethought. It did not even occur to Lottie to notice the dark looks that were thrown at her as she came downstairs all white and shining, and was wrapped by Law (always ostentatiously attentive to his sister in Polly's presence) in the borrowed glory of Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's great Indian shawl.

The party was large and crowded, and Lottie, all alone in it, was frightened and confused at first; but they were all very kind to her, she thought. Lady Caroline said, "How do you do, Miss Despard?" with something like a smile, and looked as if she might have given Lottie her hand, had not the girl been afraid; and Augusta, when she found her out, came forward with a welcome which was almost effusive. "I hear you have improved so much," she said, taking in at one glance all the particulars of Lottie's appearance, with a wondering question within herself where the roses came from, though she perceived at once that it was the same white muslin frock. And when Lottie sang, which the Signor managed she should do with great effect towards the close of the evening,

Augusta rushed to her with great eyes of astonishment. "Where did you get all that voice?" she cried; "you did not have that voice when I went away." "I flatter myself it was I that found Miss Despard out," said Rollo, suffering himself to look at her, which hitherto he had only done when there was a shield of crowding groups between him and his cousin. Before this he had managed to make the evening sweet to Lottie by many a whispered word: but when he looked at her now, unawares, under Augusta's very eyes, with that fond look of proprietorship which is so unmistakable by the experienced, and to which Lottie responded shyly by a smile and blush, and conscious tremor of happiness, neither of them knew what a fatal moment it was. Augusta, looking on, suddenly woke up to the meaning of it, the meaning of Rollo's long stay at the Deanery, and various other wonders. She gave the pair but one look, and then she turned away. But Lottie did not see that anything strange had happened. She was so happy that even when Rollo too left her, her heart was touched and consoled by the kindly looks of the people whom she knew in the crowd, the ladies who had heard her sing before at the Deanery, and who were gracious to her, and Mr. Ashford who kept by her side and watched over her—"like a father," Lottie said to herself, with affectionate gratitude, such as might have become that im-

possible relationship. The Minor Canon did not lea[ve] her for the rest of the evening, and he it was who sa[w] her home, waiting till the door was opened, and pres[s]ing kindly her trembling cold hand: for, she could n[ot] tell how, the end of the evening was depressing an[d] discouraging, and the pleasure went all out of it when Rollo whispered to her in passing, "Take care, for heaven's sake, or Augusta will find us out!" Why should it matter so much to him that Augusta should find it out? Was not she more to him than Augusta? Lottie shrank within herself and trembled with a nervous chill. She was half grateful to, half angry with even Mr. Ashford. Why should he be so much more kind to her, so much more careful of her than the man who had promised her his love and perpetual care?

But even now when she stole in, shivering with the cold of disappointment and discouragement, through the dark house to her room Lottie did not know all that this evening had wrought. And she scarcely noticed the gloom on Polly's face, nor the strain of angry monologue which her father's wife gave vent to, next morning. Polly wondered what was the good of being a married lady, when a young unmarried girl that was nobody, was took such notice of, and her betters left at 'ome? Did people know no manners? gentlefolks! they called themselves gentle-

lks, and behaved like that? If that was politeness, olly thanked heaven it was not the kind as she had een taught. But the outburst came when Lottie, king no notice, scarcely even hearing what was said, owed herself with her music in her hands going out her lesson. Polly came out of her husband's room id planted herself defiantly in Lottie's way. "Where e you going again," she said, "Miss? where are you oing again? is this to be always the way of it? Do ou mean never to stay at home nor do anything to elp nor make yourself agreeable? I declare it is ough to put a saint in a passion. But I won't put p with it, I can tell you. I did not come here to be eated like this, like the dirt under your feet."

Lottie was almost too much taken by surprise to peak. It was the first absolute shock of collision. "I m going for my lesson," she said.

"Your lesson!" cried Polly. "Oh my patience, oh y poor 'usband! that is the way his money goes— essons for you and lessons for Law, and I don't know hat! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, you wo. You ought to be making your living both of ou, if you were honest, instead of living on your ather as wants all he's got for himself. But you shan't o to any lesson if I can help it," she cried. "You'll tay at home and try and be of a little use, or you'll narch *off this very day*, and find some one else to

put up with you and your lessons. It shan't be me. I won't stand by and see my 'usband wronged. You'll ruin him between you, that's what you'll do; go back Miss, and put down them books this moment. I won't have it, I tell you. I'll not see my 'usband eaten up by the likes of you."

Polly's diction suffered from her passion, and so did her appearance. Her face grew scarlet, her eyes flashed with fury. She put out her hand to push Lottie back, who shrank from her with a cry of dismay—

"Let me pass, please," said Lottie piteously. She could not quarrel with this woman, she could not even enter so much into conflict with her as to brush past her, and thus escape. She shrank with pain and horror from the excited creature in her way.

"It's you that will have to go back," said Polly, "not me. I'm the mistress of this house, you'll pleas to recollect, Miss Lottie. Your father's been a deal t good, he's let you do just what you pleased, but th not my style. I begins as I mean to end. You sh stay here, I tell you, whatever you may think, i want to trample upon me, and eat up every per has. Go and take off your things this momer see if you can't be a little use in the house."

Lottie was struck dumb and could not s ay. She had not been cared for much i

but she had never been restrained, and the sensation was new to her. She did not know how to reply. "I do not wish to be in your way," she cried. "I shall not stay long nor trouble you long, but please do not interfere with me while I am here. I must go."

"And I say you shan't go!" said Polly, raising her voice after the manner of her kind, and stamping her foot upon the floor. "If you disobey me, I won't have you here not another day. I'll turn you out if it was twelve o'clock at night. I'll show you that I am mistress in my own house. Do you think I'm going to be outfaced by you, and treated like the dirt below your feet? Go and take off your things this moment, and try if you can't settle to a bit of work. Out of this house you shan't go, not a single step."

"I say, stand out of the way," said Law; he had come out of the dining-room with his hands in his pockets, having just finished his dinner. Law was not easily moved, but he had now made up his mind that he was on Lottie's side. "Don't give yourself airs to her. She is not of your sort," he said. "The governor may let you do many things, but not bully her. Look here, Polly, you'd better stand out of her way."

"And who are you, you lazy, useless lout, that dares to call me Polly?" she cried. "Polly, indeed! your father's wife, and far better than you. I'll make him put you to the door, too, you idle low fellow,

ending your time with a pack of silly, dressing, us[redacted].
ss girls——"

"I say, stop that," cried Law, growing red a[redacted]d seizing her suddenly by the arm; he stood upon [redacted]o ceremony with Polly, though she was his father's wi[redacted]e; but he gave an uneasy alarmed glance at Lot[redacted]ie. "There's some one waiting for you outside," he cried.

"Lottie, go."

She did not wait for any more. Trembling and horrified, she ran past and got out breathless, hastily closing the door behind her. The door had been open, and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy outside—drawing her skirts round her, physically and metaphorically, so as to avoid all pollution, yet listening to everything she could hear, was walking up and down the pavemen "Me poor child!" the good Irishwoman said, half sor half delighted to hear the first of the scandal. " ready! has it come to this? Me heart is sore fo Lottie me dear!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A CRISIS.

LOTTIE scarcely knew how she got through that afternoon. Rollo presented himself for but a moment at the Signor's, in great concern that he could not stay, and begging a hundred pardons with his eyes, which he could not put into words. Lady Caroline and Augusta had made an engagement for him from which he could not get free. "At the elm-tree!" he whispered in the only moment when he could approach Lottie. Her heart, which was beating still with the mingled anger, and wonder, and fright of her late encounter, sank within her. She could only look at him with a glance which was half appeal and half despair. And when he went away the day seemed to close in, the clouds to gather over the very window by which she was standing, and heaven and earth to fail her. Rollo's place was taken by a spectator whose sympathy was more disinterested than that of Rollo, and his pity more tender; but what was that to Lottie, who wanted only the one man whom she loved, not

any other? What a saving of trouble and pain there would be in this world if the sympathy of one did as well as that of another! There was poor Purcell turning over the music, gazing at her with timid eyes full of devotion, and longing to have the courage and the opportunity to offer her again that 'ome which poor Lottie so much wanted, which seemed opened to her nowhere else in the whole world. And on the other side stood Mr. Ashford without any such definite intention as Purcell, without any perception as yet of anything in himself but extreme "interest in," and compassion for, this solitary creature, but roused to the depths of his heart by the sight of her, anxious to do anything that could give her consolation, and ready to stand by her against all the world. The Minor Canon had been passing when that scene took place in the hall of Captain Despard's house with its open door. He had heard Polly's loud voice, and he had seen Law rush out, putting on his hat, and flushed with unusual feeling. "I don't mind what she says t me as long as she keeps off Lottie!" the young m had said; and careless as Law was, the tears b come to his eyes, and he had burst forth, "My p Lottie! what is she to do?" Mr. Ashford's heart been wrung by this outcry. What could he do? was helpless—an unmarried man; of what use c he ever be to a beautiful, friendless girl? He fel

impotent he was with an impatience and distress which did not lessen that certainty. He could do nothing for her, and yet he could not be content to do nothing. This was why he came to the Signor's, sitting down behind backs beside Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who distracted him by much pantomimic distress, shaking her head and lifting up her hands and eyes, and would fain have whispered to him all the time of Lottie's singing had not the Signor sternly interfered. ("Sure these musical folks they're as big tyrants as the Rooshians themselves," Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said indignantly.) This was all the Minor Canon could do—to come and stand by the lonely girl, though no one but himself knew what his meaning was. It could not be any help to Lottie, who was not even conscious of it. Perhaps, after all, the sole good in it was to himself.

Lottie had never sung so little well. She did not sing badly. She took trouble; the Signor felt she tried to do her best, to work at it, to occupy herself with the music by way of getting rid of things more urgent which would press themselves upon her. In short, for the time Lottie applied herself to it with some faint conception of the purposes of art. To have recourse to art as an opiate against the pangs of the inner being, as an escape from the harms of life, is perhaps not the best way of coming at it, but the Signor knew that this was one of the most beaten

ways towards that temple which to him enshrined everything that was best in the world. It was, perhaps, the only way in which Lottie was likely to get at it, and he saw and understood the effort. But it could not be said that the effort was very successful. The others, who were thinking only of her, felt that Lottie did not do so well as usual. She was not in voice, Purcell said to himself; and to the Minor Canon it seemed very natural that after the scene which she had just gone through poor Lottie should have but little heart for her work. It was easily explained. The Signor, however, who knew nothing of the circumstances, came to the most true conclusion. The agitation of that episode with Polly would not have harmed her singing, however it might have troubled herself, had Lottie's citadel of personal happiness been untouched. But the flag was lowered from that donjon, the sovereign was absent. There was no inspiration left in the dull and narrowed world where Lottie found herself left. Her first opening of vigorous independent life had been taken from her, and for the first time the life of visionary passion and enthusiasm was laid low. She did not give in. She made a brave effort, stilling her excited nerves, commanding her depressed heart. The Signor himself was more excited than he had been by all the previous easy triumphs of her inspiration. Now was the test of what she had

her. Happiness dies, love fails, but art is for ever. ıld she rise to the height of this principle, or would drop upon the threshold of the sacred place in- ıable of answering to the guidance of art alone? ver before had he felt the same anxious interest in :tie. He thought she was groping for that guidance, ugh without knowing it, in mere instinct of pain to ł something that would not fail her. She did not : so high as she had done under the other leading; : to the Signor this seemed to be in reality Lottie's t step, though she did not know it, on the rugged ent which is the artist's way of life. Strait is the h and narrow is the way in that, as in all excel- ce. The Signor praised her more than he had ever ıised her before, to the surprise of the lookers-on; : generous enthusiasm of the artist glowed in him. he could, he would have helped her over the rough- ss of the way, just as the Minor Canon, longing and iful, would have helped her if he could, over the ıghness of life. But the one man was still more werless, than the other to smooth her path. Here was not sex, nor circumstances, which were in fault, t the rigid principles of art, which are less yielding ın rocks; every step, however painful, in that thorny y the neophyte must tread for herself. The Signor ew it; but the more his beginner stumbled, the more ger was *he to cheer* her on.

"I am afraid I sang very badly," Lottie said, coming out with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy and the Minor Canon, who went along with them he scarcely knew why. He could do nothing for the girl, but he did not like to leave her—to seem (to himself) to desert her. Only himself was in the least degree aware that he was standing by Lottie in her trouble.

"Me child, you all think a deal too much about it. It was neither better nor worse; that's what I don't like in all your singing. It may be fine music, but it's always the same thing over and over. If it was a tune that a body could catch—but it's little good the best tune would have been to me this day. I didn't hear you, Lottie, for thinking what was to become of you. What will ye do? Will you never mind, but go back? Sure you've a right to your father's house whatever happens, and I wouldn't be driven away at the first word. There is nothing would please her so well. I'd go back!

"Oh, don't say any more!" cried Lottie with a movement of sudden pride. But when she caught the pitying look of the Minor Canon her heart melted. "Mr. Ashford will not be angry because I don't like to speak of it," she said, raising her eyes to him. "He knows that things are not—not very happy—at home."

Then Mr. Ashford awoke to the thought that he ight be intruding upon her. He took leave of the dies hurriedly. But when she had given him her and, he stood holding it for a minute. "I begin to ke Law very much," he said. To feel that this was ıe way in which he could give her most pleasure as a delicate instinct, but it was not such a plea- ıre as it would have been a month ago. Lottie did ot speak, but a gleam of satisfaction rose in her eyes. If there is anything I can do," he said faltering, "to e of use——"

What could he do? Nothing? He knew that, and ɔ did she. It was only to himself that this was a onsolation, he said to himself when they were gone. Ie went away to his comfortable house; and she, slim nd light, turned to the other side of the Abbey, with Irs. O'Shaughnessy, with nowhere in the world to go ɔ. Was that so? was it really so? But still he, with hat house of his, a better home than the one which oung Purcell was so eager to offer her, what could he o? Nothing; unless it were one thing which had ot before entered his thoughts, and now, when it ad got in, startled him so, that, middle-aged as ıe was, he felt his countenance turn fiery red, and ent off at a tremendous pace, as if he had miles o go. He had only a very little way to go before ıe reached his own door, and yet he had travelled

more than miles between that and the dwelling of the Signor.

As for Lottie, she went home with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, not knowing what she was to do after. The elm-tree—that was the only place in the world that seemed quite clear to her. For a moment, in the sickness of her disappointment to see Rollo abandon her, she had said to herself that she would not go; but soon a longing to tell him her trouble came upon her. After the Abbey bells had roused all the echoes, and the usual congregation had come from all quarters for the evening service, she left Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, and went slowly towards the Slopes. It was still early, and the wintry afternoon was cold. There was an east wind blowing, parching the landscape, and turning all its living tints into lines of grey. Lottie was not very warmly clothed. She had her merino gown and little cloth jacket, very plain garments, not like the furs in which Augusta had come home; but, then, Lottie was not used to living like Augusta, and perhaps her thinner wrap kept her as warm. She went up the Dean's Walk languidly, knowing that it was too early, but unable to rest. She would have to go home after all, to steal in and hide herself in her room, for this night at least; but, after that, what was she to do? The O'Shaughnessys had not a room to give her. She had no relations whom she might go to; what was to

come of her? When she got to the elm-tree there is nobody there. She had known it was too early. ie sat down and thought, but what could thinking ? What could she make of it? She looked over e wide landscape which had so often stilled and nsoled her, but it was all dead and unresponsive, ied up by that east wind; the earth and the sky, d even the horizon on which they met, all drawn in le outlines of grey. Her face was blank and pale, e the landscape, when the lover for whom she was iiting appeared. The wind, which was so cold, had iven everybody else away. They had it all to themlves, this chilly wintry landscape, the shadowy trees, th a few ragged garments of yellow or faded brown ll clinging to them. Rollo came up breathless, his et ringing upon the winding path. He came and aced himself beside her, with a thousand apologies at she should have had to wait. "It was a trick of ugusta's," he said; "I am sure she suspects someing." Lottie felt that this repeated suggestion that meone suspected ought not to be made to her. But r paleness and sadness roused Rollo to the most arty concern. "Something has happened," he said; can see it, darling, in your eyes. Tell me what it Have not I a right to know everything?" Indeed was so anxious and so tender that Lottie forgot all out offence and her disappointment, and everything

that was painful. Who had she beside to relieve her burdened heart to, to lean upon in her trouble? She told him what had happened, feeling that with every word she uttered her load was being lightened. *Oh!* how good it is to be able to say forth everything, to tell someone to whom all that happens to you is *interesting*! As she told Polly's insults, even Polly herself seemed to grow more supportable. Rollo listened to every word with anxious interest, with excitement, and indignation and grief. He held her closer to him, saying, "My poor darling, my poor Lottie!" with outbursts of rage and tender pity. Lottie's heart grew lighter and lighter as she went on. He seemed to her to be taking it all on his shoulders, the whole of the burden. His eyes shone with love and indignation. It was not a thing which could be borne; she must not bear it, he would not allow her to bear it, he cried. Finally, a great excitement seemed to get possession of him all at once. A sudden impulse seized upon him. He held her closer than ever, with a sudden tightening of his clasp, and hasty resolution. "Lottie!" he cried; and she could feel his heart suddenly leap into wild beating, and looked up trembling and expectant, sure that he had found some way of deliverance. "Lottie, my love! you must not put up with this another day. You must come away at once. Why not this very night? I could not rest and think

ɔu were bearing such indignity. You must be brave, ıd trust yourself to me. You will not be afraid, my ırling, to trust yourself to me?"

"To-night!" she said, with a cry of answering extement, alarm, and wonder.

"Why not to-night?" he cried, with more and more ıergy. "I know a place where I could take you. A ıiet, safe place, with people to take care of you, who ɔuld not suffer you to be annoyed even when I was ɔt there myself to watch over you. Lottie, dearest, ɔu would not be afraid to trust yourself to me?"

"No, Rollo, why should I be afraid?—but——" he suddenness of this prospect of deliverance, which ıe did not understand, took away Lottie's breath.

"But—there are no buts. You would be taken ıre of as if you were in a palace. You would have ɾerything to make your life pleasant. You could work your music——"

"Ah!" she said, interrupting him; his excitement ɔused no alarm in her mind. She was incapable of ıderstanding any meaning in him that was inconstent with honour. "Would it be so necessary to ıink of the music?" she said. It seemed to her that ɔr Rollo Ridsdale's wife it need not be any longer a ɔint essential. A host of other duties, more sweet, ıore homely, came before her dazzled eyes.

"Above all things!" he said, with a sudden pant, "without that what would you—how could I?——"—the suggestion was insupportable—"but we can discuss this after," he said. "Lottie, my Lottie, listen! Trust yourself to me—let me take you away out of all *this* misery into happiness. Such happiness! I scarcely can put it into words. Why should you have another day of persecution, when you can be free, if you will, this very night?"

His countenance seemed aflame as he bent towards her in the wintry twilight; she could feel the tumultuous beating of his heart. It was no premeditated villany, but a real impulse, acted upon, without any pause for thought, with that sudden and impassioned energy which is often more subtle than the craftiest calculation. Even while his heart beat thus wildly with awakened passion, Rollo answered the feeble resistance of his conscience by asking himself what harm could it do her? it would not interfere with her career. As for Lottie, she raised herself up within his arm and threw back her head and looked at him, not shrinking from him nor showing any horror of the suggestion. There was a pause—only for a moment, but it felt like half-an-hour, while wild excitement, love, and terror coursed through his veins. Surely she understood him, and was not alarmed? If she had understood him and flung away from him in outraged

rtue, Rollo would have been abject in guilt and nitence. For the moment, however, though his heart at with alarm, there was a sense of coming triumph all his being.

Lottie raised her drooping shoulders, she threw ck her head and looked at him, into the glowing ce that was so close to her. Her heart had given e answering leap of excitement, but was not beating like his. At that moment, so tremendous to m, it was not passion, but reflection, that was in her es.

"Let me think—let us think," she said. "Oh, ollo! it is a great temptation. To go away, to be fe with you——"

"My darling, my own darling! you shall never have use to fear, never to doubt me; my love will be as eady, as true——" So high had the excitement of spense grown, that he had scarcely breath to get it the words.

"Do you think I doubt that?" she said, her voice unding so calm, so soft to his excited ear. "That not the question; there are so many other things to ink of. If you will not think for yourself, I must ink for you. Oh, Rollo, no! I don't see how it uld be. Listen to me; you are too eager, oh! thank u, dear Rollo, too fond of me, to take everything

into consideration—but *I* must. Rollo! no, no; it would never do; how could it ever do, if you will only think? Supposing even that it did not matter for me, how could you marry your wife from any place but her home? It would not be creditable," said Lottie, shaking her head with all the gentle superiority of reason, "it would not be right or becoming for you."

His arm relaxed round her; he tried to say something, but it died away in his throat. For the moment the man was conscious of nothing but a positive pang of gratitude for a danger escaped; he was safe, but he scarcely dared breathe. Had she understood him as he meant her to understand him, what vengeance would have flashed upon him, what thunderbolt scathed him! But for very terror he would have shrunk and hid his face now in the trembling of the catastrophe escaped.

"More than that, even," said Lottie, going on all unaware; "I have nothing, you know; and how could I take money—*money to live upon*—from *you!*—till I was married to you? No! it is impossible, impossible, Rollo. Oh! thank you, thank you a thousand times for having thought more of me than of anything else; but you see, don't you see, how impossible it is? I will never forget," said the girl softly, drawing a little closer to him who had fallen away from her in the strange

umult of failure—yet deliverance—which took all trength from him, "I will never forget that you were eady to forget everything that was reasonable, every- hing that was sensible, and even your own credit, or me!"

Another pause, but this time indescribable. In her osom gratitude, tender love, and that sweet sense of almer judgment, of reason less influenced by passion han it would be fitting or right for his to be, which a voman loves to feel within herself—her modest pre- ogative in the supreme moment; in his a tumult of ove, disappointment, relief, horror of himself, anger nd shame, and the thrill of a hairbreadth escape. He could not say a word; what he had done seemed ncredible to him. The most tremendous denunciation would not have humbled him as did her unconscious- ness. He had made her the most villanous proposal, nd she had not even known what it meant; to her it had seemed all generosity, love, and honour. His arm lropped from around her, he had no force to hold ier, and some inarticulate exclamation—he could not ell what—sounded hoarsely in utter confusion and hame in his throat.

"You are not angry?" she said, almost wooing him n her turn. "Rollo, it is not that I do not trust you, ou know; who *should* I trust but you? If that were

all, I would put my hand in yours; you should take me wherever you pleased. But then there are the other things to be considered. And, Rollo, don't be angry," she said, drawing his arm within hers, "I can bear anything now. After talking to you, after feeling your sympathy, I can bear anything. What do I care for a woman like that? Of course I knew," said Lottie, with tears in her eyes, "that you did feel for me, that you thought of me, that you were always on my side. But one wants to have it said over again to make assurance sure. Now I can bear anything, now I can go home—though it is not much home—and wait, till you come and fetch me, Rollo, openly, in the light, in the day."

Here, because she was so happy, Lottie put her hands up to her face and laid those hands upon his shoulder and cried there in such a heavenly folly of pain and blessedness as words could not describe. That he should not claim her at once, that was a pain to her; and to think of that strange, horrible house to which she must creep back, that was pain which no happiness could altogether drive out of her thoughts. But yet, how happy she was! What did it matter for the moment her heart [was] often sore? A little while and all would be well; a little while and she would be delivered out of all these troubles. It was only a question of courage, of endurance, of fortitude and patience; and Lottie had got back her inspir-

and felt herself capable of bearing anything, everything, with a stout heart. But Rollo had neither recovered his speech nor his self-possession; shame and anger were in his heart. He had not been found out, but the very awe of escape was mingled with intolerable anger; anger no doubt chiefly against himself, but also a little against her, though why he could not have said. The unconsciousness of her innocence, which had impressed him so deeply at first and confounded all his calculations, began to irritate him. How was it possible she did not understand? was there stupidity as well as innocence in it? Most people would have had no difficulty in understanding, it would have been as clear as noonday—or, rather, as clear as gaslight; as evident as any "intention" could be. He could not bear this superiority, this obtuseness of believing; it offended him, notwithstanding that he had made by it what he felt to be the greatest escape of his life.

They parted after this not with the same enthusiasm on Rollo's part as that which existed on Lottie's. She was chilled, too, thinking he was angry with her for not yielding to his desire; and this overcast her happiness, but not seriously. They stole down by the side of the Abbey, in the shadow—Lottie talking, Rollo silent. When they came within sight of the cloister gate and the *line of the* lodges opposite, Lottie with-

drew her hand from his arm. The road looked empt and dark; but who could tell what spectator migl suddenly appear? She took his *rôle* in the eagerne of her heart to make up to him for any vexation h refusal might have given. "Don't come any further she whispered; "let us part here; someone might s us." In her eagerness to make up to him for her ow unkindness, she allowed the necessity for keeping th secret—though to think of it as a secret had wounde her before. Nevertheless, when he took her at h word and left her, Lottie, like the fanciful girl sh was, felt a pang of disappointment and painfully r alised her own desolateness, the dismal return all alor to the house out of which every quality of kindne had gone. Her heart sank, and with reluctant, linge ing steps she came out of the Abbey shadow and bega to cross the Dean's Walk, her forlorn figure movir slowly against the white line of the road and the gr of the wintry sky.

Someone was standing at the door as she came sight of her father's house. It was Captain Despa himself, looking out. "Is that you, Lottie?" he calle out, peering into the gloom. "Come in, come i where have you been? You must not stay out agai making everybody anxious." Then he came out a ste or two from his door and spoke in a whisper: "Yo know what a woman's tongue is," he said; "they hav

a great deal to answer for; but when they get excited, what can stop them? You must try not to pay any attention; be sensible, and don't mind—no more than I do," Captain Despard said.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### FAMILY DUTY: ACCORDING TO MRS. DESPARD.

THERE are some victories which feel very much like defeats. When Polly had scattered her adversaries on every side, driven forth Lottie and got rid of Law, and silenced Captain Despard—who sat in his room and heard everything but thought it wisest not to interfere—she retired upstairs to her drawing-room and celebrated her triumph by shedding torrents of tears. She had intended to make everybody very wretched, and she had done so; supposing, perhaps (though she did not really know what her motive was), that some pleasure would come to herself out of the discomfiture of the others. But pleasure rarely comes by that means, and when she had thus chased everybody out of her way, Polly threw herself down and burst forth into angry sobs and tears. It is not to be supposed that Captain Despard entertained any romantic illusions about his bride; he knew very well what Polly was. He had, as facts proved, been sufficiently fond of her to marry her, but he did not expect of her more than

Polly could give, nor was he shocked to find that she had a temper and could give violent utterance to its vagaries; all this he had known very well before. Knowing it, however, he thought it wise to keep out of the way and not mix himself up in a fray with which evidently he had nothing to do. Had she gone a step further with Lottie it is possible that he might have interfered, for, after all, Lottie was his child; and though he might himself be hard upon her at times, there is generally a mingled sentiment of family pride and feeling which makes us unwilling to allow one who belongs to us to be roughly treated by a stranger. But when Law put himself in the breach, his father sat close and took no notice; he did not feel impelled to turn his wife's batteries upon himself out of consideration for Law. Nor did it make any impression upon the Captain when he heard her angry sobs overhead. "She will come to if she is left to herself," he said, and he did not allow himself to be disturbed. Polly, in her passion, threw herself on the carpet, leaning her head upon a chair. She had changed the room after her own fashion. She had lined the curtains with pink muslin, and fastened her crochet-work upon the chairs with bows of pink ribbon; she had covered the old piano with a painted cover, and adorned it with vases and paper flowers. She had made the faded little room which had seemed a fit

home enough, in its grey and worn humility, for Lottie's young beauty, into something that looked very much like a dressmaker's ante-room, or that terrible chamber, "handsomely fitted up with toilet requisites," where the victims of the photographic camera prepare for the ordeal. But the loveliness of her handiwork did not console Polly; she got no comfort out of the pink bows, nor even from the antimacassars—a point in which Lottie's room was painfully deficient. She flung herself upon the carpet and sobbed. What was the use of being a lady, a Chevalier's wife, and living here in the heart of the Abbey, if no one called upon her or took any notice of her? Polly was not of a patient nature; it did not occur to her even that there was still time for the courtesies she had set her heart upon gaining. She had looked every day for some one to come, and no one had ever come; no one had made any advances to her at the Abbey, which was the only place in which she could assert her position as a lady and a Chevalier's wife. Even Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who had risen from the ranks, who lived next door, who was not a bit better, nay, who was much less good than Polly to begin with (for what is a trooper's wife? and she had been nothing but a trooper's wife)—even Mrs. O'Shaughnessy had passed the door as if she did not see it, and had waited outside till Miss Lottie came to her. Polly's dreams had been

very different. She had seen herself in imagination the admired of all admirers; she was by far the youngest of all the Chevaliers' wives, and the gentlemen, at least, she was sure would rally round her. Women might be spiteful, but men always did justice to a woman when she was handsome and young. Was not that written in all the records? She expected that the ladies would be spiteful—*that* would be indeed a part of her triumph. They would be jealous of her superior attractions, of her youth, of her husband's adoration of her; the old things would be in a flutter of alarm lest their old men should come within her influence. But Polly had felt pretty sure that the old gentlemen would admire her and rally round her. To make the women envious and the men enthusiastic, was not that always the way? certainly such was the course of events in the *Family Herald.* The heroine might have one friend devoted to her fortunes, a confidant more admiring, more faithful even than her lover; but all the rest of womankind was leagued against her. And so it had been in most of the novels Polly had read. But that neither men nor women should take any notice, that was a thing for which she was not prepared, and which she declared to herself she would not bear.

She had seen enough already from her windows to make her furious. She had seen Mrs. O'Shaughnessy *ostentatiously* waiting for Lottie, walking up and

down outside, making signs to the girl upstairs. She had seen Captain Temple pass and repass, looking up at the same window. She had seen the greetings that met Lottie wherever she appeared. The Chevaliers and their wives had not always looked upon Miss Despard with such favourable eyes. They had thought her proud, and they had resented her pride; but now that Lottie was in trouble it was round her they had all rallied. It was the party at the Deanery, however, which had been the last drop in Polly's cup. How was she to know that on the highest elevation she could reach as the lady of a Chevalier, she was still beneath the notice of Lady Caroline, and as far as ever from the heaven of the highest society? Polly did not know. The elevation to which she herself had risen was so immense in her own consciousness that there seemed no distinction of ranks above her. She thought, as Lottie had once thought, though from a different point of view, that gentlefolks were all one; that a gentleman's wife, if not so rich or so grand, was still on a level with Lady Caroline herself, and within the circle which encompassed the Queen. "You can't be no better than a gentleman," Polly said to herself. You might, it was true, be a lord, which some people thought better, but even a lord was scarcely above an officer. All this glorious ambition, however, what was it going to end in? She watched the carriages going

to the Deanery, and with still more furious feelings she watched Lottie in her white dress crossing the Dean's Walk. And she left at home, at the window, neglected, left out, though she was Mrs. Despard, and the other nobody! Was it possible that it might be better even to be a dressmaker, forewoman in the workroom, acknowledged to have the best eye for cutting out, and to be the quickest worker of the lot, superior so far among her equals—than to be ignored and neglected and treated as the dust under their feet by a set of poor gentlefolks? Polly felt that she must wreak her vengeance on somebody.

When she had got her fit of crying over accordingly, she jumped up to her feet and hurried to her room to put on her "things." It was her "best things" that she put on. Indeed, Polly had been wearing her best things every day with an extravagance which rather touched her conscience, though it delighted her fancy. She made herself very fine indeed that wintry afternoon, and pattered downstairs upon a pair of high heels which were more splendid than comfortable, and burst into the little room where Captain Despard sat attentive to all these sounds, and wondering what was coming next. Few people realise the advantage of a silly wife to a man who is not over wise. The Captain, though he had a high opinion of himself, was aware at the *bottom of* his heart that other people

scarcely shared that sentiment. And to have a wife whom he was fond of, and whose acquisition flattered his vanity, and who was unmistakably, though clever enough, less clever, less instructed, than he was, gave him a sense of superiority which was very pleasant to him. He looked upon her follies with much more indulgence than he had ever felt for Lottie, who did not give him the same consolation.

"Well, what is it now?" he said, with a smile.

"I want you to come out with me," Polly said. "I want to buy some things. My old muff is shabby, I couldn't wear it in the Abbey. Though they're a set of old frights and frumps, I don't wish your wife to be looked down upon by them, Harry. I can see them looking at all my things, counting up what everything costs, and whispering behind my back. That old Mrs. Jones has trimmed her bonnet exactly like mine, though she looks as if she was too grand to see me. They ain't above copying me, that's one thing."

"No wonder," said the admiring husband; "for it is long since anything so young and so handsome has been among them before. Don't they wish they could copy your face as well as your bonnet! that's all."

"Oh, get along!" said Polly, well pleased; "you're always flattering. Come and buy me a muff. I don't know what kind to get. Grebe is sweetly pretty and

ermine is delicious, but sealskin, perhaps, is the most genteel; that always looks lady-like. Did you see Mrs. Daventry go by in her carriage? Ah!" Polly sighed; how could she help it? She was very fine in her blue silk, but Augusta was finer. "She has just come from France, you know, and then, of course, they are rich. She had on a velvet with sable *that* deep——! Ah! it's hard to see folks that are no better than you with things that are so much better," cried Polly; "but, after all, though velvet and sable are very nice, give me sealskin—that's always lady-like. A sealskin jacket!—if I had that, I don't think there is anything more I should wish for in the world."

"Are they very dear?" said the Captain, with a sudden fit of liberality. He had a native love of buying, which is very general with impecunious persons, and at present was in a prodigal mood.

"Dear! Oh, not for the good they are," said Polly. "You never want another winter mantle all your life. You're set up. That makes them cheap in the end; but they cost a deal of money. I haven't seen nobody with one in all the Abbey, except the Canon's ladies."

"Then you shall have one!" said Captain Despard. He looked like a prince, Polly thought, as he stood there glowing with generous purpose. The sound of the "O—*Oh!*" *with* which she received the offer rang

through the Lodges. Such a shriek of pleasure had not been heard there since there had been Chevaliers in St. Michael's. They went out together, all beaming, arm in arm, the bride clinging fondly to her husband, the Captain looking down with delighted protection upon his bride. This sight, which is so pretty in some cases, and calls forth, if much amusement, often a great deal of sympathy, roused anything but friendly feelings in the Lodges, where the good people were getting ready for the afternoon service. Old fool was the best name they had for the bridegroom, though he was not very old; and Polly was a grievance which the ladies could not tolerate. They looked after her from their windows with feelings which were far from Christian. It was a thing they ought not to have been exposed to. There should have been an appeal to the Queen, if the gentlemen had the least energy. "But even the Queen, bless her! could not keep a man from marrying," the Warden said, deprecatingly. He did not like it any more than they did; but it is only when you are yourself of the executive that you know the difficulties of action; that is why the ladies are such critics—they have not got it to do.

Captain and Mrs. Captain Despard (Polly had got beautiful glazed cards printed stiff and strong with this title upon them) walked down to the best shop in St. Michael's, which is a very good shop indeed; and

there they bought *a beautiful sealskin.* Impossible to tell the pride, the happiness, the glory with which Polly acquired this new possession. She had not expected it. These were the days when sealskins were still a hope, a desire, an aspiration to the female mind, a property which elevated its possessor, and identified her among her peers. "That lady with the sealskin," who would think of pointing out anybody by so general a description now? are they not even going out of fashion? But Polly, for one, could not realise the possibility that such a thing could ever happen. And she had not anticipated such a bliss; the happiness was doubled by being unforeseen. This, indeed, was a proof of the blessedness of being a married lady, of having bettered herself, of having married a gentleman. Her mind was in a confusion of delight. Nevertheless she did not forget that she had come out with another and quite distinct purpose. The fact that she had herself been so fortunate did not turn her from her mission. Was it not more her duty than ever to do everything that could be done for her husband's family? When she had decided upon her sealskin, Polly began to shiver. She said, "It is a very cold day. I don't know why it should be so cold so early in the year. Don't you think it is very cold, Harry? I have come out without any wrap. Do you know I think I will put the *sealskin on.*" Why should not she? The pro-

prietor of the shop accomplished the sale with a pang. He knew Captain Despard well enough and he knew Polly, and he trembled when he thought of his bill. But what could he be but civil? He put it on for her —though how any ordinary sealskin could have covered a bosom so swelling with pride and bliss it is hard to say. And the pair went out together as they came in, except that one was almost speechless with the proud consciousness of drawing all eyes. "It is not the appearance," said Polly, "but it *is* so deliciously warm; there never was anything like it. And now I am set up. I shall not cost you any more for a winter cloak, not for years and years." "I thought you said it was to last for ever," said the Captain, equally delighted. They promenaded all the way down St. Michael's Hill, the admired of all beholders. If the remarks that were made were not precisely such as Polly hoped, still there was no doubt that remarks were made by everybody, and that the sealskin had all the honour it deserved. Sometimes, indeed, there would be a bitter in the sweet, as when the Captain took off his hat with jaunty grace to some lady whom he knew. "Who is that?" Polly would ask sharply; but the ladies all hurried by, and never stopped to be introduced; and no man took off his hat to Polly. Even against this, however, the happiness that wrapped her round defended Mrs. Despard. And how the people stared!—people who had

seen her going up and down with a little bundle of patterns on her way to her work, on her way to try on a dress—people in the shops, who had been her equals if not her superiors—to see them gazing out at her with big eyes, at her fine sealskin and her fine husband, that comforted her soul. She walked slowly, getting the full good of her triumph. But when she had got to the foot of the hill she dismissed her escort. "Now you may go," she said; "you always had plenty to do in the old days. I don't want you to say *I* tie you to my apron-string. You may go now."

"This is a pretty way to dismiss your husband," said Captain Despard; "and where are you going, may I ask, that you send me away?"

"Oh, I will tell you fast enough. I am not going anywhere you can disapprove of. I am going to see the girls," said Polly, "that is all."

"The girls! My love, you must recollect," said Captain Despard with dignity, "that the girls, as you call them, are not fit companions for you."

"You may trust me to know my place," said Polly, "and to keep them in theirs. I should think you may trust *me*."

Fortified by this assurance, the Captain left his lovely bride. He turned back to kiss his hand to her when he was half way up the hill, prolonging the sweet sorrow of the parting, and Polly blew him a kiss with

infantine grace. It was "as good as a play." "Lord, what fools they are!" said the fishmonger on the hill, who was a cynic! and the young ladies in the draper's shop shook their heads at each other and said, "Poor gentleman!" with the profoundest commiseration.

When he had left her, Polly threw out her skirts and smoothed the fur of her lovely new coat with a caressing hand. She felt that she loved it. It was more entirely delightful than even her husband—a happiness without alloy. She walked very slowly, enjoying every step of the way. She gave a penny to the beggar at the corner in the fulness of her satisfaction. So far her happiness had evidently a fine moral influence on Polly; and she was going to pay a visit, which was also very kind, to "the girls" in the River Lane. She was not one to forget old friends. She sailed along in her pride and glory through the quarter where she was so well known, and curved her nostrils at the smells, and allowed disgust to steal over her face when her path was crossed by an unlovely figure. Polly flattered herself that she was a fine lady complete; and there was no doubt that the imitation was very good in the general, so long as you did not enter into details.

At the entrance of the River Lane, however, she ceased to stand upon ceremony with herself. She picked up her skirts and went on at a more business-

like rate of speed. Some one was coming up against the light, which by this time of the afternoon came chiefly from the west, someone with his shoulders up to his ears, who took off his hat to Polly, and pleased her until she perceived that it was only Law. "You here!" she said: and as she looked at him the moral influence of the sealskin almost vanished. Thus she went in state to visit the scenes in which so much of her previous life had passed. But a new sentiment was in Polly's eyes. She felt that she had a duty to do—a duty which was superior to benevolence. She pushed open the green swing door with a delicious sense of the difference. The girls were talking fast and loud when she opened the door, discussing some subject or other with all the natural chatter of the workroom. There was a pause when the sound of her heels and the rustle of her silk was heard—a hush ran round the table. How well Polly knew what it meant! "They will think it is a customer," she said to herself; and never customer swept in more majestically. They were all at work when she entered, as if they did not know what it was to chatter, and Ellen rose respectfully at the first appearance of the lady.

"Mother is upstairs, ma'am, but I can take any orders," she said; and then with a shriek cried out "Polly!"

"Polly!" echoed all the girls.

Here was a visitor indeed. They got up and made a circle round her, examining her and all she "had on." "In a sealskin!" 'Liza and Kate cried in a breath, with an admiration which amounted to awe. One of them even put forth her hand to stroke it in her enthusiasm. For an instant Polly allowed this fervour of admiration to have its way. Then she said, languidly—

"Give me a chair, please, and send Mrs. Welting to me. I wish to speak to Mrs. Welting. I am sorry to interrupt your work, young ladies—it is Mrs. Welting I want to see."

"But, Polly!" the girls cried all together. They were too much startled to know what to say. They stood gaping in a circle round her.

"I thought you had come to see us like a friend—like what you used to be."

"And weren't we all just glad to see you again, Polly—and quite the lady!" cried another. They would not take their dismissal at the first word.

"Young ladies," said Polly, "I've not come in any bad spirit. I don't deny as I've passed many a day here. My family (though always far above the dress-making) was not well off, and I shall always be thankful to think as I did my best for them. But now that I'm married, in a different position," said Polly, "though always ready to stand your friend, when you want a

friend, or to recommend you among the Abbey ladies, you can't think as I can go on with you like you were in my own sphere. Where there's no equality there can't be no friendship. Perhaps you wouldn't mind opening a window? It's rather early to put on my sealskin, but one never knows at this time of the year —and I'm 'eated with my walk. Send Mrs. Welting to me, please."

There was a great commotion among the girls. The two passive ones stood with open mouth, struck dumb by this magnificence.

"Lor!" cried Kate, finding no other word that could express her emotion.

Emma, though she was the youngest, was the most vehement of all. "I know what she's come for. She's come to make mischief," cried Emma. "I wouldn't fetch mother. I wouldn't go a step. Let her speak straight out what she's got to say."

"There's reason in everything," said Ellen. "You mayn't mean to keep us up like friends. Just as you like, I'm sure; none of us is wanting to keep it up; but mother takes no hand in the business, and that you know as well as me."

"Send Mrs. Welting to me," cried Polly, waving her hand majestically. She did not condescend to any further reply. She leant back on her chair and unfastened her *beloved mantle* at the throat. Then she

got out a laced handkerchief and fanned herself. "Me that thought it was so cold," Polly remarked to herself, "and it's like summer!" She did not pay any further attention to the young women, who consulted together with great indignation and excitement at a little distance.

"What can she have to say to mother? I wouldn't call mother, not if she was to sit there for a week," said Emma, who had a presentiment as to the subject of the visit.

"Lord! just look at her in her sealskin," interrupted Kate, who could think of nothing else.

But Ellen, who was the serious one, paused and hesitated. "We can't tell what it may be—and if it turned out to be a job, or something she had got us from some of the Abbey ladies! She's not bad natured," said Ellen, full of doubts.

All this time Polly waved her handkerchief about, with its edge of lace, fanning herself. She looked at no one—she was too much elevated above all the associations of the place to deign to take any notice. Had not she always been above it? With her disengaged hand she smoothed the fur of her sealskin, rubbing it knowingly upward. She was altogether unconscious of their talk and discussion. What could *they* have in common with Mrs. Despard? To see her,

if any of her former associates had been cool enough to notice it, was still "as good as a play."

The upshot was, that while the others, with much ostentation of dragging their seats to the other end of the table, sat down and resumed their work with as much appearance of calm as possible, Ellen ran upstairs in obedience to her own more prudent suggestions, and reappeared shortly with her mother, a large, comely woman, who, not knowing who the visitor was, was a little expectant, hoping for a very good order—a trousseau, or perhaps mourning. "Or it might be the apartments," Mrs. Welting said. And when she entered the workroom she made the lady a curtsey, then cried out, as her daughters had done, "Why, bless my heart, Polly! The idea of taking me in like this, you saucy things," she cried, turning, laughing, upon the girls. But she did not get any response from these indignant young women, nor from Polly, who made no reply to her salutation, but sat still, delicately fanning herself.

Mrs. Welting stood between the two opposed parties, wondering what was the matter. Since Polly was here, she could have come only in friendship. "I'm sure I'm very glad to see you," she said, "and looking so well and so 'andsome. And what a lovely sealskin you've got on!"

"*Mrs. Welting,*" *said* Polly, with great dignity, tak-

ing no notice of these friendly remarks, "I asked for you because I've something to say that is very particular. You don't take much charge of the business, but it is you as one must turn to about the girls. Mrs. Welting, you mayn't know, but there's goings on here as always gave me a deal of annoyance. And now I've come to tell you they must be put a stop to. I never could endure such goings on, and I mean to put a stop to them now."

"Lord bless us!" said Mrs. Welting. She was really alarmed. She gave a glance round upon her girls, all bursting with self-defence, and made them a sign to be silent. Then she turned to her visitor with a mixture of anxiety and defiance. "Speak up, Polly," she said; "nobody shall say as I won't listen, if there's anything against my girls; but speak up, for you've gone too far to stop now."

"How hot it is, to be sure!" said Mrs. Despard, "in this close bit of a place. I wish someone would open a window. I can't think how I could have put up with it so long. And I wonder what my 'usband would say if he heard me spoke to like that? I thought you would have the sense to understand that I've come here for your good. It wasn't to put myself on an equality with folks like you, working for your living. *I* don't want to be stuck up, but a lady must draw the line somewhere. Mrs. Welting, I don't suppose you

:now it—you ain't often in the workroom—it would ›e a deal better if you was. There's gentlemen comes ıere, till the place is known all over the town; and here is one young gentleman as I take a deal of nterest in as makes me and his papa very uneasy all long of coming here——"

"Gentlemen! coming here!" cried Mrs. Welting, ›ooking round upon her daughters with mingled anger nd dismay.

"I know what I'm talking about," said Polly; "let hem contradict me if they dare. He comes here nostly every day. One of the girls is that silly as to hink he's after her. After her! I hope as he has nore sense; he knows what's what a deal too well for hat. He takes his fun out of them—that is what he loes. But you may think yourself what kind of feel-ıgs his family has—the Captain and me. That's the ne that encourages him most," Mrs. Despard added, ›ointing out Emma with her finger. "She is always nticing the poor boy to come here."

"Oh, you dreadful, false, wicked story!" cried :mma, flushed and crying. "Oh, mother, it ain't no-hing of the kind! It was she as brought him first. ihe didn't mind who came when she was here. She aid it was no harm, it was only a bit of fun. We ras always against it—at least Ellen was," added the ulprit, bursting *forth into* sobs and tears.

"Yes, I always was," said Ellen, demurely—it was not in human nature not to claim the palm of superior virtue—"but it was not Emma, it was Polly that began. I've heard her argue as it was no harm. She was the first with the Captain, and then when young Mr. Despard——"

"I am not going to sit here, and listen to abuse of my family," said Polly, rising. "I wouldn't have mentioned no names, for I can't abide to have one as belongs to me made a talk about in a place like this. I came to give you a warning, ma'am, not these hardened things. It isn't for nothing a lady in my position comes down to the River Lane. I've got my beautiful silk all in a muddle, and blacks upon a white bonnet is ruination. I did it for your sake, Mrs. Welting, for I've always had a respect for you. And now I've done my Christian duty," said Polly, with vehemence, shaking the dust from her blue silk. "There's them that talk about it, like that little Methody Ellen, but there ain't many that do it. But don't let anybody suppose," she cried, growing hotter and hotter, "that I mean to do it any more! If you let him come here after this, I won't show you any mercy—we'll have the law of you, my 'usband and I. There's laws against artful girls as entice poor innocent young men. Don't you go for to think," cried Mrs. Despard, sweeping out while they all gazed after her,

eechless, "because I've once done my Christian duty at I'm going to do it any more!"

We will not attempt to describe the commotion at followed—the reproaches, the tears, the fury of e girls betrayed, of which none was more hot than at of Ellen, who had to stand and hear herself called Methody—she who was conscious of being an glican and a Catholic without blemish, and capable anything in the world before Dissent.

Polly sailed up the hill, triumphant in that consousness of having done her duty as a Christian, but ually determined not to do it any more; and what th the consciousness of this noble performance, and at with the sealskin, found it in her power to be nost agreeable to her step-daughter, when the Capn, who, after all, was Lottie's father, and did not e the idea that his girl should be banished from his use, had met her and brought her in.

"She has not had the careful bringing-up that you ve had, my child," the Captain said. "She hasn't d your advantages. You must have a little patience th her, for my sake." Captain Despard had always en irresistible when he asked tenderly, with his head one side, and an insinuating roll in his voice, that ything should be done for his sake.

Lottie, who was happy in the sense of her lover's adiness to sacrifice everything for her sake (as she

thought), and to whom the whole world seemed fa
in consequence, yielded without any struggle; w
Polly, on her part, put on her most gracious looks.

"If you take every word I say for serious," s
Polly, "I don't know whatever I shall do. I never
used to have my words took up hasty like that. I
a deal of naughtiness that I don't mean—don'
Harry? You and me would never have come toge
should we, if you'd always gone and taken me at
word?" And so the reconciliation was effected,
things went on as before. There was no similar
currence in respect to Law, whose looks at Polly
murderous; but, then, Law had no delicacy of s
ment, and, whatever had happened, would have c
into his meals all the same.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### FAMILY DUTY: BY A FINER ARTIST.

Rollo did not come away from the strange excitement of that interview on the Slopes with the same feelings which filled the mind of Lottie. The first intense sensation of shame with which he had realised the villany of the proposal which Lottie did not understand soon changed into a different sentiment. He had felt its guilt, its treacherous cruelty, under the guise of devotion, far more bitterly and intensely than as if she had understood and denounced him; and the relief of his escape from an indignation and horror which must have been as overwhelming as the confidence, had made him feel how great a danger he had run, and how terrible to him, as well as to her, would have been the discovery of his base intention. How could he ever think that Lottie, proud, and pure, and fearless of evil as she was, could have fallen into such a snare! He felt himself a fool as well as a villain; perceiving, too, by the light of fact, what he would not have understood in theory, that the very uncomprehension of innocence makes guilt contemptible as well as

terrible. If she could have understood him, he would scarcely have felt so mean, so miserable, so poor a creature as he did now; not even a gay and fine betrayer, but a pitiful cheat and would-be criminal, false to everything that nature trusts in. Rollo had not been irreproachable hitherto; but such sins as he had indulged in had been done among those who were sinners like himself, among people who had a cynical comprehension of the worth of promises and the value of vows. He had never tried that *rôle* of the seducer before; and the fact that his own shame and horror were real made them all the more hard to bear. Shame, however, of this bitter kind is not an improving influence. Soon it began to turn to anger equally bitter. He tried to think that Lottie was partly to blame, that she had "led him on," that he never would have gone so far but for "encouragement" from her. Even it flashed across his mind that she was not so unconscious as she appeared, but had pretended ignorance in order to rivet her chains upon him, and force him to the more honourable way which was so much more for her interest. He tried to force this idea into his own mind, which was not sufficiently depraved to receive it; but yet it was not long before he was angry, irritated against the girl who would not understand him, and sore with the humiliation she had inflicted unawares.

Other influences, too, came in to break the purer ɔell of honourable love under which Rollo, to his own ırprise, had so entirely fallen. With the return of ugusta and her husband, the world seemed to have ɔme back and seized him. Even the society of ugusta, of itself, had an immediate influence, break- ıg up the magic of the seclusion in which he had ɛen content to live. Lady Caroline was not a woman ho could be called unworldly, but she was passive, ıd did not take any initiative even in the way of ɔssip. She liked to hear it; there came a little gleam f interest to her eyes when the stories of the great orld were brought to her, when she was told who as going to marry who, and by what schemes and tifices the marriage had been brought about; and ho had most frequently and boldly broken the mar- age vow, and by whom it had been most politely uded; and how everybody lived and cheated, and ɔthing was as it seemed; and all that is done for ıoney, and that is done for pleasure, in that busy, nall, narrow-minded village society—which is the orld. But though she loved to hear, she could not ɛgin; for, unless people told her what was going on, ɔw, she sometimes asked piteously, was she to know? s for the Dean, he was not in the habit of it any ıore than his wife, though when he went to town he ould bring down invariably a piece of news from his

club—of somebody's appointment, or somebody's good luck, or somebody's wedding. "Now, why can't you go and do likewise?" he would say to Rollo. But all this was mild and secondary in comparison with Augusta, who brought the very air of what Mr. Jenkins calls the Upper Ten into the Deanery, perfuming all the rooms and all the meals with stories of fortunes won and lost, of squabbles, ministerial and domestic, of marriages and dinners alike "arranged," and all the wonderful *dessous des cartes* and *behind the scenes* with which so many people are acquainted in fashionable life. Who so well as Augusta knew that when the Duke of Mannering gave up his governorship, it was not from any political reason, but because the life he led was such that the place was far too hot to hold him, and Government was only too glad to send out Algy Fairfax, though he was only a younger son, and had no particular interest, simply to smooth things down? And what a lucky thing it was for Algy to be there just at the right moment, when there was nobody else handy, and just when Lord Arthur was there, who had got him to explain matters to his elder brother, and knew what he could do! It was what old Lady Fairfax had been scheming for all her life, just as she had been scheming to catch young Snellgrove for Mina. Of course she had succeeded. Mina was almost distracted, everybody knew. It was she who had that

ffair with Lord Colbrookdale, and now everybody said ıe was wildly in love with Reginald Fane, her cousin; ut she might just as well be in love with St. Paul's, ır he had not a penny, and she was to be married irectly. Did you hear about her settlements? They ere simply ridiculous. But that old woman was onderful. There was nothing she did not think of, ıd everything she wanted she got. And then there as 'that story about poor young Jonquil, of the War epartment, who married somebody quite out of the uestion, a poor clergyman's daughter, or something f that sort, without a penny (though he might have ad the rich Miss Windsor Brown for the asking, eople said), and of the dreadful end he had come ), living down in some horrid weedy little cottage bout Kew, and wheeling out two babies in a peramulator. All these tales, and a thousand more, ugusta told, filling the Deanery with a shameful train f people, all doing something they did not want to o, or forcing others to do it, or following their pleaıre through every law, human and divine. Lady aroline sat in her easy-chair (she was not allowed to ut up her feet except in the evening, after dinner, hen Augusta was at home), and listened with halflosed eyes, but unfailing attention. "I knew his ıther very well," she would say now and then, or "his ıother was *a great friend* of mine." As for Rollo, he

knew all the people of whom these stories were told. He had seen the things beginning of which his cousin knew all the conclusions, and what went on behind the scenes, and thus he was carried back after the idyll of the last six weeks to his own proper world. He began to feel that there was no world but that, that nothing else could make up for the want of it; and a shudder ran over him when he thought of Jonquil's fate. Augusta, for her part, did not conceal her surprise to find him at the Deanery. "What is Rollo doing here?" she said to her mother.

"I am sure, my dear, I do not know. He seems to like it, and we are very glad to have him," Lady Caroline replied. But that did not satisfy Mrs. Daventry's curiosity. What could a young man of fashion, a man of the world, do here?

"I wonder what he is after," she said; "I wonder what his object can be. It can't be only your society and papa's. I should just like to know what he is up to. He is not a fool, to have gone and got entangled somehow. I wonder what he can mean by it!" Augusta cried; but her mother could give her no idea. Lady Caroline thought it was natural enough.

"I don't see that it is so strange," she said. "Autumn is a terrible time. To sleep in a strange bed night after night, and never settle down anywhere!

Rollo likes to be comfortable; and then ther
Miss Despard. You have heard about Miss D

"What about Miss Despard?" Augusta sai
ing up her ears.

"She is to be the prima donna," said La
ine. "He thinks she will make his fortune.
lways got some wild scheme in his head.
o annoy me very much to have her here——

"And did you have her here?" cried
oused into sudden excitement. "Oh, why
now of it! I thought there must be som
ottie Despard! And were you obliged to
ere, mamma? What a bore it must have
ou!"

"I did not like it, my dear," her lady
ut after a while she added, conscience c
er, "She sang very nicely, Augusta; she ha
oice."

"She has plenty of voice, but she cann
ote," said Augusta, with vehemence, who w
ithout any voice to speak of, a very w
usician. She would not say any more t
ady Caroline, but she took her measur
lelay. And the result of Augusta's enquire
ollo found his feet entangled in a web
nents which separated him from Lottie. I
e was sore and angry, he had not given

nor had he any intention so to do. When, however, the day came for Lottie's next lesson, Mrs. Daventry herself did the Signor the honour of calling upon him just before his pupil appeared. "You know the interest I always took in Lottie. Please let me stay. We have so many musical friends in town that I am sure I can be of use to her," Mrs. Daventry said; and the consequence was that when Lottie and her companion entered the Signor's sitting-room, the great chair between the fire and the window in which Mrs. O'Shaughnessy usually placed herself was found to be already occupied by the much greater lady, whose sudden appearance in this cordial little company put everybody out. Augusta sat leaning back in the big chair, holding a screen between her cheek and the fire, her fine Paris bonnet, her furs, and her velvet making a great appearance against the dark wall, and her smiles and courtesy confounding every individual of the familiar party. She was more refined, far less objectionable than Polly, and did her spiriting in a very different way; but there could be little doubt that the fine artis was also the most effectual. She put the entire part out, from the least to the greatest, though the sweetc of smiles was on her face. Even the Signor was r himself with this gracious personage superintending exertions. He was a good English Tory, of the r orthodox sentiments; but he was at the same time

impatient Italian, of despotic tastes, and did not easily tolerate the position of second in his own house. Rollo, who had determined to be present, whatever happened, but who, by a refinement of cruelty, did not know his cousin was coming, came in with all the ease of habit, and had already betrayed the fact of his constant attendance at these strange lessons, when Augusta called to him, covering him with confusion. "We shall be quite a family party," she said. "I'm so glad you take an interest in poor Lottie *too*." Rollo could not but ask himself what was the meaning of this sudden friendliness and interest; but he was obliged to place himself by her side when she called him. And when Lottie came in, at whom he did not dare to look, his position became very uncomfortable. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, finding her seat occupied, and herself compelled to take a lower place, sat down on a chair near the door, with wrath which made her countenance flame. She had stood up in the room a minute before she seated herself, looking round for a more comfortable place, and had greeted Mr. Ridsdale joyously as an old friend. But even Rollo, usually so polite, who never saw her without doing his very best to make himself agreeable, even he never attempted to introduce her to his cousin, and the good woman sat down accordingly, against the wall, silent and fuming, while Augusta took the chief place. The stranger in the

midst of them turned the whole party upside down. Even Purcell was so occupied by the conversation that was kept up in whispers by Augusta, in her corner, even during the singing, that he missed to turn the leaves at the proper moment. Augusta knew very well what she was doing. She had a respect for the Signor, but she had higher purposes in hand. She kept Rollo by her side, and kept up a conversation with him through all, which was, like her usual conversation, deeply pervaded by the essence of society and "the Upper Ten." She kept it up in a whisper when Lottie began to sing. "Don't you think she is handsome? She is a little like Lady Augustus Donjon about the eyes—don't you think so? Oh, I never told you that good story about the Augustus Donjons," said Mrs. Daventry; and she told her story, all through the song, half audible.

"Wasn't it good?" Augusta said; and then, "That is such a pretty song; and, Lottie, you are so improved, I should never have known it to be the same voice. Yes, wasn't it good, Rollo? Augustus Donjon is always the first to laugh himself, and even the children have got it in the nursery. She is such a jolly woman, she never minds. What are we going to have next? Oh, that will be very nice!" said Augusta.

Was it wonderful that Purcell should lose the place? The young fellow did all he could to stop the fine

dy with furious glances; and the Signor, though his ack was turned to her, felt the whisper and the in-gnity run through every nerve of him. Even in his ack you could see, Purcell thought, how horribly an-oyed he was. His sensitive shoulders winced and nuddered, his elbows jerked. He could not attend to is accompaniment, he could not attend to his pupil. n the very midst of a song he said aloud, distracted y the s's of a whisper which was louder than usual, This must never happen again." As for Lottie, she id not know what she was doing. She sang—because was the hour for her lesson, because she found her-elf standing there by the side of the Signor's piano—ut not for any other reason. She had neither in-piration, nor had she that nascent sense that Art ight perhaps console for other losses which she had nce felt when Rollo was away. She was distracted y the whispering behind her, from which she could ot withdraw her attention. Why did he listen? Why id he allow Augusta to draw him into unfaithfulness o her? And yet, how could he help it? Was it not ll Augusta's fault? But with whomsoever the fault ay, Lottie was the victim. Her voice could not be ot out. And the reader knows that Augusta was ght—that this poor girl, though she had the voice of n angel, did not as yet know how to sing, and had o science *to neutralise* the impressions made upon

her which took away all her heart and her voice. She went on making a brave fight; but when once the Signor faltered in his accompaniment, and said loud out, "This must never happen again," and when Purcell forgot to turn the page, what is it to be supposed Lottie could do, who was not the tenth part of a musician such as they were? She faltered, she went wrong. Tune she could not help keeping, it was in her nature: even her wrong notes were never out of harmony; but in time she went wildly floundering, not even kept right by the Signor. Even that did not matter very much, seeing that none of these people, who generally were so critical, so censorious, so ready to be hard upon her out of pure anxiety for her, were in a state of mind to perceive the mistakes she was making. And it was only vaguely that Lottie herself was aware of them. Her whole attention was attracted in spite of herself by the whispering in the corner.

"Oh, thank you so much!" Augusta broke forth, when she came to the end. "What a charming bit that is! It is Schubert, of course, but I don't know it. The time was a little odd, but the melody was beautiful."

"You know my weakness," said the Signor stiffly, turning round. "I cannot answer for myself when people are talking. I am capable of doing anything that is wrong."

"Oh! I remember," cried Mrs. Daventry; "you used
be very stern with all our little societies. Not a
ord were we allowed to say. We all thought it hard,
ut of course it was better for us in the long run.
nd are you as tyrannical as ever, Signor?"

"Not so tyrannical since ladies come here, and
urry on their charming conversation all the same. I
ily wish I could have profited by it. It seemed
nusing and instructive. If I were not unhappily one
those poor creatures who can only do one thing at
time——"

"Oh, Signor, how very severe you are!" said
ugusta. "I was only telling my cousin some old
ories which I am sure you must have heard weeks
go. You know the Donjons? No! Oh, I thought
erybody knew the Augustus Donjons! They go
erywhere; they have friends in music and friends in
t, and you meet all sorts of people at their house.
ottie, when you are a great singer, I hope you will
member me, and send me cards now and then for
ie of your concerts. There are so many things going
now, and all so expensive, that people in our cir-
mstances really can't do everything. Spencer has
alls where we go when there is anything particular;
it I assure you, now-a-days, one can no more afford
*box* at the opera——! You know, Signor; but I
resay *your friends always* find you places somewhere."

"That is true. If everything else fails, a friend of mine who plays second violin will lend me his instrument," said the Signor, "or a box-keeper now and then will be glad of an evening's holiday. They are *blasés*, these people. They do not care if Patti sings. They will rather have a holiday and go to a music-hall."

Augusta looked at her cousin, puzzled. She did not see the irony. After all, she thought, there was not, perhaps, so very much difference between a musician and those perfectly gentlemanlike people who showed you to your box or your stall. She had often thought how nice they looked. The Signor saw her bewilderment, and added, with a smile—"You have never recognised me in my borrowed part?"

"Oh, Signor!—certainly not. I never meant to say anything that would suggest—to imply anything that might——indeed, I hope you will not think I have been indiscreet," cried Augusta. "But, Rollo, we mus go, we must certainly go. I told mamma you wou come with me to see the old Skeffingtons. Spencer away, and I must return their call. Signor, I do h you will forgive me. I meant nothing that was agreeable. I am sure we are all put to worse st than that, in order to get a little amusement wi ruining ourselves. Oh, Rollo, *please* come away!"

Rollo had snatched an instant as Lottie ga

ıer music together. "It is not my fault," he said. She never lets me alone. I did not know she was ɔming here to-day. Do not put on that strange look."

"Have I a strange look?" Lottie said. What ups ınd downs were hers!—the other day so triumphant, ınd now again so cast down and discouraged. The ears were standing in her eyes, but she looked at him ıravely. "It does not matter," she said; "perhaps she loes not mean it. It takes away my heart, and then have not any voice."

"Oh, my love!" he whispered under his breath. And I must put up with it all. At the elm-tree, lear, to-night."

"Oh, no, no!" she said.

"Why no no? it is not my fault. Dear, for ity——"

"What are you saying to Miss Despard, Rollo? I m jealous of you, Lottie; my cousin never comes to ıy lessons. And, indeed, I wonder the Signor allows . It is very delightful for us, but how you can work, ɜally *work* with such a train!" Augusta turned ɔund and looked severely at Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. If I were the Signor I should not admit one creature ĸcept your maid."

But this was an indignity which mortal could not ɑdure. The kind Irishwoman rose to her feet as uickly as the low chair would permit. "And sure, I

agree with the lady," she said. "Lottie, mè love, I can bear a deal for you, and I've stood your friend through thick and thin, as all here knows. But come again to the Signor's I won't, not if you were to go down on your knees—unless he gives his word of honour that them that hasn't a scrap of manners, them that don't know how to behave themselves, that whispers when you're singing, and interrupts when you're speaking, will never be here again to insult you—at least not when Mistress O'Shaughnessy's here."

Leaving this fine outburst of indignation to vibrate through the room, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy turned upon her heel, and, grasping Lottie by the arm, took the *pas* from Augusta, and marched out with blazing eyes and countenance flushed with war. "Ye can bring the music," she said to old Pick, who had been listening, and whose disappointment at Lottie's break-down was great, "and there'll be a shilling for you. I'd scorn to be beholden to one of them." Rollo made an anxious attempt, but in vain, to catch Lottie's eyes as she wa swept past him. But Lottie would not return hi glance. Augusta had done a great deal more exec tion with her subtle tactics than Polly with hers which, perhaps, were not more brutal because tl were so much less refined.

"What an odious woman!" Augusta cried; "w ing out of the room before me. But, Rollo, she

uite right, though she was so impudent. You ought ot to go there. Mamma says you want Lottie Despard or your new opera. She would never do. She has a oice, but she doesn't know how to sing. A good udience would never put up with her."

"That is all a mistake," said Rollo; "it may be ery well to know how to sing, but it is much better o have a voice."

"I could not have supposed you were so old-ashioned; never say that in public if you want anyone o have any opinion of you. But even if you are so ure of her you should keep away; you should not nterfere with her training. The fact is," said Augusta, ery seriously, "I am dreadfully afraid you have got nto some entanglement even now."

"You are very kind," said Rollo, smiling, "to take uch care of me."

"I wish I could take a great deal more care. I m almost sure you have got into some entanglement, hough, of course, you will say no. But, Rollo, you now, you might as well hang yourself at once. You ould never hold up your head again. I don't know hat on earth would become of you. Uncle Court-and would wash his hands of you, and what could ny of your friends do? It would be moral suicide," aid Augusta, with solemnity. "I told you about oung Jonquil, and the state he was in. Rollo! that's

the most miserable thing that can happen to a man; other things may go wrong, and mend again; your people may interpose, or a hundred things may happen; but this sort of thing is without hope. Oh, Rollo, take it to heart! There are many things a man may do that don't tell half so much against him. You would be poor, and everybody would give you up. For goodness' sake, Rollo, think of what I say."

He gave her an answer which was not civil; and, as he went along by her side to old Canon Skeffington's, there suddenly gleamed across his mind a recollection of the elm-tree on the Slopes, and all the sweetness of the stolen hours which had passed there. And Lottie had said "No." Why should she have said "No?" It seemed to him that he cared for nothing else so much as to know why for this first time she had refused to meet him. Had she began to understand his proposition? had she found out what it was he meant? Was she afraid of him, or indignant, or——? But she had not looked indignant. Of all things in the world, there was nothing he wanted so much as to know what Lottie meant by that refusal. Yet, notwithstanding, he did take to heart what Augusta said.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### ANOTHER CHANCE.

MR. ASHFORD, the Minor Canon, had, anyone would have supposed, as tranquil yet as pleasantly occupied a life as a man could have. He had not very much of a clergyman's work to do. There was no need for him to harass himself about the poor, who are generally a burden upon the shoulders or hung about the neck of the parish priest; he was free from that weight which he had found himself unable to bear. He had only the morning and evening prayers to think of, very rarely even a sermon. Most clergymen like that part of their duties; they like to have it in their power to instruct, to edify, or even to torture the community in general, with perfect safety from any reprisals; but Ernest Ashford in that, as in many other things, was an exception to the general rule in his profession. He was not fond of sermons, and consequently it was a very happy thing for him that so few were required of him. He was now and then tormented by his pupils, which brought his life within the ordinary conditions of humanity; otherwise, with his daily duty in the

beautiful Abbey, which was a delight to him, and the leisure of his afternoons and evenings, and the landscape that lay under his window, and the antique grace of his little house, and all his books, no existence could have been more unruffled and happy. He was as far lifted above those painful problems of common life which he could not solve, and which had weighed upon him like personal burdens in the beginning of his career, as his window was above the lovely sweep of country at the foot of the hill. What had he to do but sing Handel, to read and to muse, and to be content? These were the natural conditions of his life.

But it would appear that these conditions are not fit for perverse humanity; for few indeed are the persons so happily exempt from ordinary troubles who do not take advantage of every opportunity to drag themselves into the arena and struggle like their neighbours. Mrs. Ashford did this in what may be called the most wanton and unprovoked way. What business had he to take any interest in Lottie Despard? She was out of his sphere; the Abbey stood between them, a substantial obstacle; and many things a great deal more important—social differences, circumstances that tended to separate rather than to bring together. And it was not even in the orthodox and regular way that he had permitted this girl to trouble his life. He might have

fallen in love with her, seeing her so often in the Abbey (for Lottie's looks were remarkable enough to attract any man), and nobody could have found fault. It is true, a great many people would have found fault, in all likelihood people who had nothing to do with it and no right to interfere, but who would, as a matter of course, have pitied the poor man who had been beguiled, and indignantly denounced the designing girl; but no one would have had any right to interfere. As a clergyman of the Church of England Mr. Ashford had absolute freedom to fall in love if he pleased, and to marry if he pleased, and nobody would have dared to say a word. But he had not done this: he had not fallen in love, and he did not think of marriage; but being himself too tranquil in his well-being, without family cares or anxieties, perhaps out of the very forlornness of his happiness, his attention had been fixed —was it upon the first person he had encountered in the midst of a moral struggle harder, and therefore nobler, than his own quiescent state? Perhaps this was all. He could never be sure whether it was the girl fighting to keep her father and brother out of the mire, fighting with them to make them as honest and brave herself, or whether it was simply Lottie that interested him. Possibly it was better not to enter into this question. She was the most interesting person within his *range*. *His* brethren the Canons, Minor and

Major, were respectable or dignified clergymen, very much like the rest of the profession. Within the Abbey precincts there was nobody with any particular claim upon the sympathy of his fellows, or whose moral position demanded special interest. The Uxbridges were anxious about their son, who was a careless boy, not any better than Law; but then the father and mother were quite enough to support that anxiety, and kept it to themselves as much as possible. It was not a matter of life and death, as in Law's case, who had neither father nor mother to care what became of him, but only Lottie—a creature who herself ought to have been cared for and removed far from all such anxieties. Even the deficiency in Lottie's character—the pain with which she was brought to see that she must herself adopt the profession which was within her reach, and come out from the shelter of home and the menial work with which she was contented, to earn money and make an independence for herself—had given her a warmer hold upon the spectator, who, finding himself unable to struggle against the world and himself, had withdrawn from that combat, yet never could quite pardon himself for having withdrawn. She, poor child, could not withdraw; she was compelled to confront the thing she hated by sheer force of necessity, and had done so—compelled, indeed, but only as those who can are compelled. Would she have fled from the

contemplation of want and pain as he had done? Would she have allowed herself incapable to bear the consequences of the duty set before her, whatever it might be? Sometimes Mr. Ashford would ask himself this question: though what could be more ridiculous than the idea that a girl of twenty could judge better than a man of five-and-thirty? But he was interested in her by very reason of her possession of qualities which he did not possess. He had given her good advice, and she had taken it; but even while he gave it and pressed it upon her he had been thinking what would she have said to his problems, how would she have decided for him? All this increased his interest in Lottie. He realised, almost more strongly than she did herself, all the new difficulties that surrounded her; he divined her love, which pained him not less than the other troublous circumstances in her lot, since he could not imagine it possible that any good could come out of such a connection. That Rollo Ridsdale would marry anyone but an heiress his superior knowledge of the world forced him to doubt; he could not believe in a real honest love, ending in a marriage, between the Chevalier's daughter and Lady Caroline's nephew. And accordingly this, which seemed to Lottie to turn her doubtful future into a certainty of happiness, seemed to Mr. Ashford the worst of all the dangers in *her lot.* It would be no amusement for

her, as it would be for the other; and what was to become of the girl with her father's wife in possession of her home and such a lover in possession of her heart? His spectatorship got almost more than he could bear at times; nobody seemed to see as he did, and he was the last person in the world who could interfere to save her. Could anyone save her? He could not tell; he knew no one who would take the office upon himself; but least of all could he do it. He watched with interest which had grown into the profoundest anxiety — an anxiety which in its turn was increased tenfold by the sense that there was nothing which he could do.

Such were the feelings in his mind when the Signor joined him on his homeward way after service on the afternoon when Mrs. Daventry had so interrupted Lottie's lesson. Augusta had sailed up the aisle and out by the door in the cloisters which adjoined the Deanery, as they came out of the room where all the surplices were hanging in their old presses, and where the clergy robed themselves. The two men came out when the rustle and flutter of the party of ladies were still in the air, and old Wykeham looking after them with cynical criticism. The hassocks in the aisles, which had been placed there for the convenience of the overflowing congregations, too great for the Abbey choir, which crowded every corner now and then, were all driven about like boats at sea by the passage of these

billows of trailing silk, and Wykeham had stooped to put them back into their places. Stooping did not suit the old man, and he could not do without his natural growl. "I wish they'd stick to 'em," he said; "plenty of dirt sticks to 'em. They sweeps up the aisles and saves us trouble; but I'd just like one o' them heavy hassocks to stick."

"And so should I," said the Signor under his breath. "They are insufferable," he said with vehemence as he emerged into the cloister. "I have made up my mind I shall not allow any intrusion again."

"Who are insufferable, and what is the intrusion you are going to prevent?" said the Minor Canon with a smile.

"Ashford," said the Signor with much heat, "I am not going to have you come any more to Miss Despard's lessons. Don't say anything to me on the subject; I know all about interest and so forth, but I can't permit it. It's ruin to her, and it irritates me beyond bearing. Interest? if you take any real interest in her you would see that nothing could be less for her welfare, nothing more destructive of any chances she may have——"

"My dear Rossinetti, I never was present at Miss Despard's lesson but once."

"It was once too much, then," the Signor cried. "The girl is getting ruined. That woman, that Mrs.

Daventry—you should have heard her whispering behind our backs with her fan in front of her face, then stopping a moment to say, 'What a pretty song: how much you have improved.'"

The Signor made an attempt to mimic Augusta, but he had no talent that way, and the mincing tone to which he gave utterance was like nothing that had ever been heard before. But if his imitation was bad his disgust was quite genuine. He could not think of anything else; he returned again and again to the subject as they went on.

"The upper classes," he said, "are famous for good manners. This is their good manners: Two of them thrust themselves in for their amusement to a place where a poor girl is working hard at art, and a man who has spent most of his life in learning is trying to transmit his knowledge to her. And the moment that girl begins singing *they* begin their loathsome chatter about Mr. this and My Lady that. Do not say anything to me, Ashford; I tell you, you shall not come, you nor anyone else, again."

"Is she making progress?" said the Minor Canon.

"Progress? how could she, with that going on? No; sometimes she will sing like an angel, sometimes like — anyone. It drives me wild! And then our gracious patrons appear—Mr. Ridsdale (who ought to know better) and Mrs. Daventry. I ought to know

better too; I will defend my doors from henceforth. To be sure, I did not mean that; *you* may come if you like."

"And Mr. Ridsdale talked? How did she bear it?" said Mr. Ashford nervously.

"It is I who will not bear it," said the musician. "And these are people who pretend to love music—pretend to know: it is insufferable. If she ever becomes a great singer——"

"If? I thought you had no doubt."

"How was I to know I should be intruded upon like this? Poor girl. I think, after all, the best thing for her will be to marry my boy, John Purcell, and live a quiet life."

"Marry—Purcell?"

"Why not? He is a very good musician; he will live to make a great deal of money: he has genius—positively genius. The best thing she could do would be to marry him. She is too sensitive. Susceptibility belongs to the artist temperament, but then it must be susceptibility within control. Her voice flutters like a flame when the wind is blowing. Sometimes it blows out altogether. And he loves her. She will do best to marry my John."

"You cannot have so little perception, Rossinetti. How can you entertain such an idea for a moment? Purcell?"

pitied of all is the poor fellow, who has followed his heart, who is poor, who lives at Kew, and has two babies in a perambulator. I laugh at him myself," said the Signor—"the fool, to give up his club and society because he took it into his silly head to love!"

"Rossinetti," said the Minor Canon, "I know there are quantities of these wretched stories about; but human nature is human nature, after all, not the pitiful thing they make it out. I don't believe they are true."

"What! after all the newspapers—the new branch of literature that has sprung from them?" cried the Signor. Then he paused again and subsided. "I am of your opinion," he said. "The fire would come down from heaven if it was true; but *they* believe it: that is the curious thing. You and I, we are not in society; we are charitable; we say human nature never was so bad as that; but they believe it. Rollo Ridsdale would be ashamed to behave like a man, as you and I would feel ourselves forced to behave, as my boy John is burning to do."

"You and I." The Minor Canon scarcely knew how it was that he repeated these words; they caught his ear and dropped from his lips before he was aware.

The Signor looked at him with a smile which

was half satire and a little bit sympathy. He said, "That is what you are coming to, Ashford. I see it in your eye."

"You are speaking—folly," said Mr. Ashford; then he added hastily, "I have got one of my boys coming. I must go in."

"Good-day," said the other with his dark smile. He had penetrated the secret thoughts that had not as yet taken any definite form in his friend's breast. Sometimes another eye sees more clearly than our own what is coming uppermost in our minds—or at least its owner believes so. The Signor was all the more likely to be right in this, that he had no belief in the calm sentiment of "interest" as actuating a man not yet too old for warmer feelings, in respect to a woman. He smiled sardonically at Platonic affection—as most people indeed do, unless the case is their own. He knew but one natural conclusion in such circumstances, and settled that it would be so without more ado. And such reasoning is sure in the majority of cases to be right, or to help to make itself right by the mere suggestion. To be sure he took an "interest"—a great interest—in Lottie himself; but that was in the way of art.

Mr. Ashford had no boy coming that he knew of when he said this to escape from the Signor; but, as sometimes happens, the expedient justified itself, and

he had scarcely seated himself in his study when some one came up the oak staircase two or three steps at a time, and knocked at his door. In answer to the "Come in," which was said with some impatience—for the Minor Canon had a great deal to think about, and had just decided to subject himself to a cross-examination—who should open the door but Law—Law, without any book under his arm, and with a countenance much more awake and alive than on the occasions when he carried that sign of study. "Can I speak to you?" Law said, casting a glance round the room to see that no one else was there. He came in half suspicious, but with serious meaning on his face. Then he came and placed himself in the chair which stood between Mr. Ashford's writing-table and his bookcases. "I want to ask your advice," he said.

"Well; I have done nothing else but give you my advice for some time past, Law."

"Yes—to work—I know. You have given me a great deal of that sort of advice. What good is it, Mr. Ashford? I've gone on week after week, and what will it ever come to? Well, I know what you are going to say. I work, but I don't work. I don't care a bit about it. I haven't got my heart in it. It is quite true. But you can't change your disposition; you can't change your nature."

"Stop a little, Law. So far as work is concerned you often can, if you will——"

"Ah, but there's the rub," said Law, looking his Mentor in the face. "I don't want to—that is the simple fact. I don't feel that I've the least desire to. I feel as if I won't even when I know I ought. I think it's more honest now at last to tell you the real truth."

"I think I knew it pretty well some time ago," said the Minor Canon with a smile. "It is a very common complaint. Even that can be got over with an effort. Indeed, I am glad you have found it out. Perhaps even, you know, it is not your brain at all but your will that is at fault."

"Mr. Ashford," said Law solemnly, "what is the good of talking? You know and I know that I never could make anything of it if I were to work, as we call it, till I was fifty. I never could pass any examination. They would be fools indeed if they let me in. I am no real good for anything like that. You know it well enough; why shouldn't you say it? Here are you and me alone—nobody to overhear us, nobody to be vexed. What is the use of going on in the old way? I shall never do any good. You know it just as well as I."

"Law," said Mr. Ashford, "I will not contradict you. I believe *you* are right. If there ~~was~~ were any other

way of making your living I should say you were right. Books are not your natural tools; but they open the door to everything. The forest service, the telegraph service—all that sort of thing would suit you."

At this point Law got up with excitement, and began walking up and down the room. "That is all very well," he said. "Mr. Ashford, what is the use of deceiving ourselves? I shall never get into any of these. I've come to ask your advice once for all. I give up the books; I could only waste more time, and I've wasted too much already. It has come to this: I'll emigrate or I'll 'list. I don't see how I'm to do that even, for I've no money—not enough to take me to London, let alone Australia. Why shouldn't I do the other? It's good enough; if there was a war it would be good enough. Even garrison duty I shouldn't mind. It wouldn't hurt *my* pride," the lad said with a sudden flush of colour that belied his words; "and I might go away from here, so that it would not hurt *her*. That's all, Mr. Ashford," he said with suppressed feeling. "Only her—she's the only one that cares; and if I went away from here she would never know."

"Has anything happened to drive you to a decision at once? Is there anything new—anything——?"

"There is always something new," said Law. "That woman has been to—to the only place I ever cared

o go—to shut the door against me. They were her wn friends too—at least people as good as—a great leal better than she. She has been there to bully hem on my account, to say they are not to have me. Do you think I'll stand that? What has she to do vith me?"

"It must be a great deal worse for your sister, .aw."

"Well, isn't that what I say? Do you think I can tand by and see Lottie bullied? Once she drove her ut of the house. By Jove, if Lottie hadn't come ome I'd have killed her. I shouldn't have stopped o think; I should have killed her," said Law, whose wn wrong had made him desperate. "Do you think can stand by and see Lottie bullied by that wo- nan? She's brought it partly upon herself. She was oo hard in the house with her management both pon the governor and me. She meant it well, but he was too hard. But still she's Lottie, and I can't ee her put upon. Do you think I am made of stone," ried Law indignantly, "or something worse than tone?"

"But if you were in Australia what better would ne be? There you would certainly be of no use to er."

Law was momentarily staggered, but he recovered imself. "She would know I was doing for myself,"

he said, "which might mean something for her, too, in time. I might send for her. At least," said the lad, "she would not have me on her hands; she would only have herself to think of; and if she got on in her singing—the fact is, I can't stand it, and one way or other I must get away."

"What would you do if you were in Australia, Law?"

"Hang it all!" said the young man, tears of vexation and despite starting to his eyes, "a fellow must be good for something somewhere. You can't be useless all round; I'm strong enough. And here's one thing I've found out," Law added with a laugh: "it doesn't go against your pride to do things in the Colonies which you durstn't do here. You can do—whatever you *can* do out there. It doesn't matter being a gentleman. A gentleman can drive a cart or carry a load in Australia. That is the kind of place for me. I'd do whatever turned up."

Said Mr. Ashford suddenly, "I know a man ou there—" and then he paused. "Law, what would yo sister do? There would be no one to stand by h Even you, you have not much in your power, but y are always some one. You can give her a little s pathy. Even to feel that there are two of you mus something."

"Mr. Ashford," said Law, "you will do her

good than I should. What have I been to poor Lottie? Only a trouble. Two of us—no; I can't take even that to myself. I've worried her more than anything else. She would be the first to thank you. You know a man——?"

"I know a man," said the Minor Canon—"I had forgotten him till now—a man who owes me a good turn; and I think he would pay it. If I were sure you would really do your best, and not forget the claims she has upon your kindness——"

"Would you like me to send for her as soon as I had a home for her?" Law asked with fervour. There was a subdued twinkle in his eye, but yet he was too much in earnest not to be ready to make any promise.

"That would be the right thing to do," said the Minor Canon with excessive gravity, "though perhaps the bush is not exactly the kind of place to suit her. If you will promise to do your very best——"

"I will," said the lad, "I will. I am desperate otherwise; you can see for yourself, Mr. Ashford. Give me only an opening; give me anything that I can work at. If I were to 'list I never should make much money by that. There's only just this one thing," said Law: "If I had a friend to go to, and a chance of employment, and would promise to pay it back, I suppose I might get a loan somewhere—a loan on

good interest," he continued, growing anxious and a little breathless—"perhaps from one of those societies, or some old money-lender, or something—to take me out?"

The Minor Canon laughed. "If this is what you are really set upon, and you will do your best," he said, "I will see your father, and you need not trouble your mind about the interest. Perhaps we shall be able to manage that."

"Oh, Mr. Ashford, what a good fellow you are! what a good friend you are!" cried Law, beaming with happiness. The tears once more came into his eyes, and then there came a glow of suppressed malice and fun behind that moisture. "Lottie will be more obliged even than I," he said; "and I could send for her as soon as I got settled out there."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### LOTTIE RESENTFUL.

LOTTIE was sadly disheartened by the events of that day. She came home alike depressed and indignant, her heart and her pride equally wounded. She had scarcely seen Rollo for the two intervening days, and the meeting at the Signor's had appeared to her before it came a piece of happiness which was certain, and with which no one could interfere. He would resist all attempts to wile him away for that afternoon, she was sure; he would not disappoint her and take all her inspiration from her again. Since that last meeting under the elm-tree she had been more full of happy confidence in him than ever. His readiness and eagerness to take her away at once, overcoming, as she thought, all the scruples and prejudices of his class, in order to secure deliverance for her, had filled her mind with that soft glow of gratitude which it is so sweet to feel to those we love. The elation and buoyant sense of happiness in her mind had floated her over all the lesser evils in her path. What *did they* matter, what did anything mat-

ter, in comparison? She was magnanimous, tolerant, ready to believe the best, unready to be offended, because of this private solace of happiness in her bosom, but all the more for those undoubting certainties she had felt the contrast of the actual scene. She did not even think that Rollo might be innocent of his cousin's visit, or that he knew nothing of her coming till he had walked unawares into the snare. Lottie did not know this. She saw him by Augusta's side, talking to her and listening to her. She was conscious through all her being of the rustle of whispering behind her, which went on in spite of her singing. She would not look at him to see what piteous apologies he was making with his eyes, and when Mrs. O'Shaughnessy in sudden wrath dragged her away Lottie was glad of the sudden exit, the little demonstration of offence and independence of which she herself might have failed to take the initiative. She went home tingling with the wound, her nerves excited, her mind irritated. She would not go to meet him, as he had asked her. She went home instead, avoiding everybody, and shut herself up in her own room. She was discouraged too and deeply annoyed with herself, because in the presence of the unkindly critic who had been listening to her, Lottie felt she had not done well. Generally her only care, her only thought, was to please Rollo; but that day she would have wished

for the inspiring power that now and then came upon her, as when she had sung in the Abbey not knowing of his presence. She would have liked to sing like that, overawing Augusta and her whispering; but she had not done so. She had failed while that semi-friend who was her enemy looked on. She felt, with a subtle certainty beyond all need of proof, that Augusta was her enemy. Augusta had at once suspected, though Rollo had said that she would never suspect; and she wanted to make her cousin see how little Lottie was his equal, how even in her best gifts she was nothing. It was bitter to Lottie to think that she had done all she could to prove Augusta right. Why was it that she could not sing then, as, two or three times in her life, she had felt able to sing, confounding all who had been unfavourable to her? Lottie chafed at the failure she had made. She was angry with herself, and this made her more angry both with Augusta and with him. In the heat of her self-resentment she began to sing over her music softly to herself, noting where she had failed. Had the Signor been within hearing how he would have rejoiced over that self-instruction. Her friends had been so much mortified that it opened her eyes to her own faults. She saw where she had been wrong. There is no such stimulant of excellence as the sense of having done badly. Lottie's art education advanced under

the sting of this failure as it had never done before. She threw herself into it with fervour. As she ran over the notes she seemed to hear the "sibilant s's" behind her, pursuing her, and the chance words she had caught. "Like him—she did not care a straw for him." "The old lady made it all up," "and the settlements were astonishing." That and a great deal more Lottie's jealous ears had picked up, almost against her will, and the words goaded her on like so many pricks. She thought she never could suffer it to be possible that Augusta or any other fine lady should do less than listen when she sang again.

While Lottie sat there cold in the wintry twilight (yet warm with injured pride and mortification) till there was scarcely light enough to see, humming over her music, Rollo, getting himself with difficulty free of his cousin and all the visitors and commotion of the Deanery, rushed up to the elm-tree, and spent a very uncomfortable moment there, waiting in the cold, and wondering if it was possible that she would not come. It did not occur to him that Lottie, always so acquiescent and persuadable, could stand out now, especially as he was not really to blame. He stood about under the elm, now and then taking a little walk up and down to keep himself warm, watching the light steal out of the wide landscape and everything darken round him, for half an hour and more.

No one was there; not an old Chevalier ventured upon a turn in the dark, not a pair of lovers confronted the north wind. Rollo shivered, though he was more warmly clad than Lottie would have been. He walked up and down with an impatience that helped to keep him warm, though with dismay that neutralised that livelier feeling. He had no desire to lose his love in this way. It might be foolish to imperil his comfort, his position, his very living, for her, but yet now at least Rollo had no intention of throwing her away. He knew why she sang badly that afternoon, and instead of alarming him this knowledge brought a smile upon his face. Augusta had behaved like a woman without a heart, and Lottie was no tame girl to bear whatever anyone pleased, but a creature full of fire and spirit, not to be crushed by a fashionable persecutor. Rollo felt it hard that he should wait in the cold, and be disappointed after all; but he was not angry with Lottie. She had a right to be displeased. He was all the more anxious not to lose her, not to let her get free from him, that she had thus asserted herself. His love, which had been a little blown about by those fashionable gales that had been blowing round him, blazed up all the hotter for this temporary restraint put upon it. She who had trusted him with such an exquisite trust only the other evening, who had not in her innocence seen *anything* but devotion in the sudden

proposal into which (he persuaded himself) only passion could have hurried him—her first rebellion against him tightened the ties that bound him to her. Give her up! it would be giving up heaven, throwing away the sweetest thing in his life. He was cold, but his heart burned as he paced his little round, facing the north wind and listening for every rustling sound among the withered leaves that lay around him, thinking it might be her step. The darkness, and the chill, and the solitude all seemed to show him more clearly how sweet the intercourse had been which had made him unconscious of either darkness or cold before. Augusta repeating her endless monotonous stories of universal guile and selfishness had made him half ashamed of his best feelings. He was ashamed now of her and her influence, ashamed of having been made her tool for the humiliation of his love. What a difference there was between them! Was there anyone else in the world so tender, so pure, so exquisite in her love and trust, as Lottie, the creature whose sensitive heart he had been made to wound? When at last, discouraged and penitent, he turned homeward, Rollo had the intention trembling in his mind of making Lottie the most complete amends for everything that had ever been done to harm her. He paused at the gates of the cloister, and looked across at the light in her window with a yearning which sur-

prised him. He seemed to have a thousand things to say to her, and to be but half a being when he had not her to confide in, to tell all his affairs to—although he had never told her one of his affairs. This fact did not seem to affect his longing. He went so far as to walk across the Dean's Walk, to see what he thought was her shadow on the blind. It was not Lottie's shadow, but Polly's, who had taken her place; but this the lover did not know.

Meanwhile Lottie had been disturbed in her seclusion by a sharp knock at her door. "Do you mean to stay there all night, Miss?" cried Polly's sharp voice. "You might pay me the compliment to keep me company now and again as long as you stay in my house. If you think it is civil to stay there, shut up in your room, and me all alone in the drawing-room, I don't. I can't think where your hearts is, you two," Polly went on, a whimper breaking into the tone of offence with which she spoke. "To see one as is not much older than yourself, and never did you no harm, and not a soul to keep her company. Was it for that I give up all my own folks, to come and sit dressed up in a corner because I'm Mrs. Despard, and never see a soul?"

Lottie had opened her door before this speech was half done. She said with a little alarm, "Please don't speak so loud. We need not let the maid in the kitchen *know*."

"Do you think I care for the maid in the kitchen? She's my servant. I'll make her know her place. Never one of them sort of folks takes any freedom with me. I have always been known for one as allowed no freedoms—no, nor no followers, nor perquisites, nor nothing of the kind. They soon find out as I ain't one to be turned round their finger. Now you," said Polly, leading the way into the little drawing-room, "you're one of the soft sort. I dare say they did what they liked with you!"

"I don't think so," said Lottie, following. She put her music softly down upon the old piano, which Polly had swathed in a cover, and the changed aspect of the room moved her half to laughter, half to anger and dismay.

"There are few as knows themselves," said Polly. "That girl, that Mary as you had, I couldn't have put up with her for a day. Some folks never sees when things is huggermugger, but I'm very particular. Your Pa—dear, good, easy man—I dare say he's put up with a deal; but to be sure no better was to be expected, for you never had no training, I suppose?"

Lottie was almost too much taken by surprise to reply—she, who had felt that if there was one thing in the world she could do it was house-keeping! The confusion that is produced in the mind by the sudden perception of another's opinion of us which is diame-

trically opposed to our own seized her; otherwise she would have been roused to instant wrath. This, which was something so entirely opposite to what she could have expected, raised only a kind of ludicrous bewilderment in her mind. "I—don't know what you mean," said Lottie. "Papa has not very much money to give for house-keeping. Perhaps you are making a mistake."

"Oh, it is likely that I should make a mistake! Do you think I don't know my own husband's income? Do you think," said Polly with scorn, "that he has any secrets from *me*?"

Lottie was cold with her imprisonment in her fireless room. She drew her little chair to the blazing fire and sat down by the side. Polly had placed herself in the largest chair in the room, directly in front of it. The fire was heaped up in the little grate, and blazed, being largely supplied. It was very comfortable, but it went against the rules of the economy which Lottie had strenuously prescribed to herself. "Papa spends a great deal of money himself," she said; "you will find that you must be very sparing at home."

"My dear," said Polly in a tone of condescending patronage which brought the colour to Lottie's face, "I am not one as can be sparing at home. Pinching ain't my way. I couldn't do it, not if I was to be made *a countess for it.* Some folks can scrape and

cut down and look after everything, but it ain't my nature. What I like is a free hand. Plenty to eat and plenty to drink, and no stinting nowhere—that's what will always be the law in my house."

Lottie made no reply. She felt that it was almost a failure from her duty to put out her hands to the warmth of the too beautiful fire. Some one would have to suffer for it. Her mind began to run over her own budget of ways and means, to try, as had been her old habit, where she could find something to cut off to make up for the extravagance. "These coals burn very fast," she said at last. "They are not a thrifty kind. I used to have the——"

"I know," said Polly, "you used to have slates and think it was economy—poor child!—but the best for me: the best is always the cheapest in the end. If anyone thinks as I will put up with seconds, either coals or bread!—but since we're on the subject of money," continued Polly, "I'll tell you my mind, Miss, and I don't mean it unfriendly. The thing as eats up my husband's money, it ain't a bright fire or a good dinner, as is his right to have; it's your brother La Miss, and you."

"You have told me that before," Lottie said, w a strenuous effort at self-control.

"And I'll tell it you again—and again—till it its effect," cried Polly: "it's true. I don't mean t

unfriendly. I wonder how you can live upon your Pa at your age. Why, long before I was your age I was doing for myself. My Pa was very respectable, and everybody belonging to us; but do you think I'd have stayed at home and eat up what the old folks had for themselves? They'd have kept me and welcome, but I wouldn't hear of it. And do you mean to say," said Polly, folding her arms and fixing her eyes upon her step-daughter, "as you think yourself better than me?"

Lottie returned the stare with glowing eyes, her lips falling apart from very wonder. She gave a kind of gasp of bewilderment, but made no reply.

"I don't suppose as you'll say so," said Polly; "and why shouldn't you think of your family as I did of mine? You mightn't be able to work as I did, but there's always things you could do to save your Pa a little money. There's lessons. There's nothing ungenteel in lessons. I am not one as would be hard upon a girl just starting in the world. You've got your room here, that don't cost you nothing; and what's a daily governess's work? Nothing to speak of —two or three hours' teaching (or you might as well call it playing), and your dinner with the children, and mostly with the lady of the house—and all the comforts of 'ome after, just as if you wasn't out in the world *at all; a deal* different from sitting at your

needle, working, working, as I've done, from morning to night."

"But I don't know anything," said Lottie. "I almost think you are quite right. Perhaps it is all true; it doesn't matter nowadays, and ladies ought to work as well as men. But—I don't know anything." A half-smile came over her face. Notwithstanding that she was angry with Rollo, still—he who would have carried her away on the spot rather than that she should bear the shadow of a humiliation at home—was it likely——? Lottie's mind suddenly leaped out of its anger and resentment with a sudden rebound. He did not deserve that she should be so angry with him. Was it his fault? and in forgiving him her temper and her heart got suddenly right again, and all was well. She even woke to a little amusement in the consciousness that Polly was advising her for her good. The extravagant coals, the extravagant meals, would soon bring their own punishment; and though Lottie could not quite free herself from irritation on these points, yet she was amused by the thought of all this good advice.

"That's nonsense," said Polly promptly. "No here's a way you could begin at once, and it wo be practice for you, and it would show at least t you was willing. I've been very careless," she s getting up from her chair and opening the old p

She had to push off the cover first, and the noise and commotion of this complicated movement filled Lottie with alarm. "I've done as a many young ladies do before they see how silly it is. I've left off my music. You mayn't believe it, but it's true. I can't tell even if I know my notes," said Polly, jauntily but clumsily placing her hands upon the keyboard and letting one finger fall heavily here and there like a hammer. "I don't remember a bit. It's just like a great silly, isn't it? But you never think when you are young, when your head's full of your young man and all that sort of thing. It's when you've settled down, and got married, and have time to think, that you find it out."

Polly was a great deal less careful of her language as she became accustomed to her new surroundings. She was fully herself by this time, and at her ease. She sat down before the piano and ran her finger along the notes. "It's scandalous," she said. "We're taught when we're young, and then we thinks no more of it. Now, Miss, if you was willing to do something for your living, if you was really well disposed and wanted to make a return, you might just look up some of your old lesson-books and begin with me. I'd soon pick up," said Polly, making a run of sound up and down the keys with the back of her fingers, and thinking *it beautiful;* "it would come back to me in

two or three lessons. You needn't explain nothing about it; we might just say as we were learning some duets together. It would all come back to me if you would take a little trouble; and I shouldn't forget it. I never forget it when anyone's of use to me."

"But," cried Lottie, who had been vainly endeavouring to break in, "I cannot play."

"Cannot play!" Polly turned round upon the piano-stool with a countenance of horror. Even to turn round upon that stool was something delightful to her, like a lady in a book, like one of the heroines in the *Family Herald;* but this intimation chilled the current of her blood.

"No—only two or three little things, and that chiefly by ear. I never learned as I ought. I hated it; and I was scarcely ever taught, only by—someone who did not know much," said Lottie with a compunction in her mind. Only by someone who did not know much—This was her mother, poor soul, whom Polly had replaced. Lottie's heart swelled as she spoke. Poor, kind, silly mamma! she had not known very much; but it seemed cruel to allow it in the presence of her supplanter.

"Goodness—gracious—me!" said Polly. She said each word separately, as if she were telling beads. She cast at Lottie a glance of sovereign contempt. "You to set up for being a lady," she cried, "and can't

*ay the piano!* I never heard of such a thing in all y born days."

If she had claimed not to be able to work, Polly ıuld have understood it; but if there is a badge of dyhood, or even a pretence at ladyhood, in the ɔrld, is it not this? She was horrified; it felt like a ıming down in the world even to Polly herself.

Again Lottie did not make any reply. She was mple enough to be half ashamed of herself and half ıgry at the criticism which for the first time touched ɛr; for it was a fact that she was ignorant, and a ıameful fact. She could not defend, but she would ɔt excuse herself. As for Polly, there was in her a ingling of triumph and regret.

"I *am* surprised," she said. "I thought one who ɛtended to be a lady ought at least to know that uch. And you ought to be a lady, I am sure, if ever ıyone was, for your Pa is a perfect gentleman. Dear, ɛar—if you can't play the piano, goodness gracious, hat have you been doing all your life? That was the ıe thing I thought was sure—and you are musical, ɾ I've heard as you could sing. If it's only that you on't take any trouble to oblige," said Polly angrily, ɜay it out. Oh, it won't be no surprise to me. I've ɛn it in your face already—say it out!"

"I have told you nothing but the truth," said

Lottie. "I am sorry for it. I can sing—a little—but I can't play."

"It's just the same as if you said you could write but couldn't read," said Polly; "but I've always been told as I've a nice voice. It ain't your loud kind, that you could hear from this to the Abbey, but sweet—at least so folks say. You can teach me to sing if you like," she said, after a pause. "I never learned singing. One will do as well as the other, and easier too."

This was a still more desperate suggestion. Lottie quailed before the task that was offered to her. "I can show you the scales," she said doubtfully; "that is the beginning of everything; but singing is harder to teach than playing. The Signor thinks I don't know anything. They say I have a voice, but that I don't know how to sing."

"The fact is," cried Polly, shutting down the piano with a loud bang and jar which made the whole instrument thrill, and snapped an old attenuated chord which went out of existence with a creak and a groan, "the fact is, you don't want to do nothing for me. You don't think me good enough for you. I am only your father's wife, and one as has a claim upon your respect, and deserves to have the best you can do. If it was one of your fine ladies as don't care a brass farthing for you—oh, you'd sing and you'd play the piano safe

enough: but you've set your mind against me. I seen it the first day I came here—and since then the life you've led me! Never a civil word—never a pleasant look; yes and no, with never a turn of your head; you think a deal of yourself. And you needn't suppose I care—not I—not one bit; but you shan't stand up to my face and refuse whatever I ask you. You'll have to do what I tell you or you'll have to go."

"I will go," said Lottie in a low voice. She thought of Rollo's sudden proposal, of the good people whom he said he would take her to, of the sudden relief and hope, the peace and ease that were involved. Ought she not to take him at his word? For the moment she thought she would do so. She would let him know that she was ready, ready to go anywhere, only to escape from this. How foolish she had been to be angry with Rollo—he who wanted nothing better than to deliver her at a stroke, to carry her away into happiness. Her heart softened with a great gush of tenderness. She would yield to him; why should she not yield to him? She might think that he ought to marry his wife from her father's house, but he had not seemed to think so. He thought of nothing but to deliver her from this humiliation—and what would it matter to him? a poor Chevalier's house or a poor quiet lodging, what would it matter? She would go. She would do as Rollo said.

"You will go?" cried Polly; "and where will you go? Who have you got to take you in? People ain't so fond of you. A woman as can do nothing for herself, who wants her? and isn't even obliging. Oh, you are going to your room again, to be sulky there? But I tell you I won't have it. You shall sit where the family sits or you shall go out of the place altogether. And you'll come to your meals like other people, and you'll mix with them as is there, and not set up your white face, as if you were better than all the world. You're not so grand as you think you are, Miss Lottie Despard. If it comes to that I'm a Despard as well as you; and I'm a married woman, with an 'usband to work for me—an 'usband," cried Polly, "as doesn't require to work for me, as has enough to keep me like a lady—if it wasn't that he has a set of lazy grown-up children as won't do nothing for themselves, but eat us out of 'ouse and 'ome!"

Was it possible that this humiliation had come to Lottie—to Lottie of all people—she who had felt that the well-being of the house hung upon her, and that she alone stood between her family and utter downfall? She sat still, not even attempting now to escape, her ears tingling, her heart beating. It was incredible that it was she, her very self, Lottie, who was bearing this. It must be a dream; it was impossible that it could be true.

And thus Lottie sat the whole of the evening, too proud to withdraw, and bore the brunt of a long series of attacks, which were interrupted, indeed, by the supper, to which Polly had to give some personal care, and by Captain Despard's entrance and Law's. Polly told her story to her husband with indignant vehemence. "I asked her," she said, "to help me a bit with my music—I know you're fond of music, Harry—and I thought we'd learn up some duets or something, her and me, to please you; and she says she can't play the piano! and, then, not to show no offence, I said as singing would do just as well, and then she says she can't sing!" The Captain received this statement with much caressing of his wife and smoothing of her ruffled plumes. He said, "Lottie, another time you'll pay more attention," with a severe aspect; and not even Law had a word to say in her defence. As to Law, indeed, he was very much preoccupied with his own affairs; his eyes were shining, his face full of secret importance and meaning. Lottie saw that he was eager to catch her eye, but she did not understand the telegraphic communications he addressed to her. Nor did she understand him much better when he pulled her sleeve and whispered, "I am going to Australia," when the tedious evening was over. Law's career had fallen out of her thoughts in the troubles of those few weeks past. She had even ceased to ask

how he was getting on, or take any interest in his books; she remembered this with a pang when she found herself at last safe in the shelter of her room. She had given up one part of her natural duty when the other was taken from her. Australia? What could he mean? She thought she would question him to-morrow; but to-morrow brought her another series of petty struggles, and once more concentrated her mind upon her own affairs.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### LOTTIE SUBDUED.

"I WAITED half an hour. I was not very happy," said Rollo. "It is never cold when you are here, but last night the wind went through and through me. That is the consequence of being alone. And you, my Lottie, had you no compunctions? Could you make yourself happy without any thought of the poor fellow freezing under the elm-tree?"

"Happy!" Lottie cried. She was happy now. Last night she had been alone, no one in the world caring what became of her; now she felt safe, as if the world held nothing but friends; but she shivered, notwithstanding her lover's supporting arm.

"Not happy then? Does it not answer, darling? Can you endure the woman? Is she better than at first? I like her," said Rollo, "for you know it was her arrival which opened your heart to me—which broke the ice—which brought us together. I shall always feel charitably towards her for that."

Lottie shivered again. "No, it is not because of the cold," she said. "I do not suppose you could understand if I were to tell you. Home! I have not

any home!" cried the girl. "I was thinking—if it was really true what you said the other night—if it would make no difference to you, Rollo, to take your wife out of some poor little lodging instead of out of her father's house—are you sure you would not mind?" she said, looking wistfully, anxiously into his face. In the waning light all he could see distinctly was this wistful dilation of her eyes, gazing intently to read, before he could utter it, his answer in his face. "I could manage to live somehow," she went on, tremulously. "Though I cannot give lessons, I can work, very well. I think I am almost sure I could get work. No; I would not take money from you; I could not, Rollo:—not until—no, no; that would be quite impossible; rather stay here and bear it all than that. But if really, truly, to marry a poor girl, living in a poor little room, working for her bread, would not make any difference to you——. Oh, I know, I know it is not what ought to be—even here, even at home, I am not equal to you. You ought to have some one a great deal better off—a great deal higher in the world. But if you would not think it—discreditable; if you would not be ashamed—— oh, Rollo," she cried, "I cannot bear it! it is impossible to bear it!—I would ask you to do what you offered and take me away!"

It is impossible to describe the feelings with which

Rollo listened to these unexpected words. To see a bird walk into the snare must awake compunctions in the most experienced trapper. The same sensation does not attend a sudden fall; but the sight of an innocent creature going calmly into the death set before it, as if into safety and shelter—a man must be hard indeed to see that unmoved. And Rollo was no villain. His heart gave one wild leap again, as it had done when, in the hurrying of passion, not with deliberation (as he had always been comforted to think), he had laid that snare. The thrill of his hairbreadth escape from her horror and loathing, the leap of sudden, horrified delight to find her in his power all at once, by her own act and deed, transported him for the moment with almost uncontrollable power; and then this sudden passion in his mind was met by the stream, the torrent, of a more generous impulse, a nobler passion, which carried everything before it. A man may trap his prey with guile, he may take advantage of the half-willingness of a frail resistance; but to turn to shame the perfect and tender confidence of innocence, who but a villain could do that? and Rollo was no villain. He grasped her almost convulsively in his arms as she spoke; he tried to interrupt her, the words surging, almost incoherent, to his lips. "Lottie! my Lottie!" he cried, "this is not how it must be. Do you think I will let *you go to live* alone, to work, as you say?"

He took her hand hastily, and kissed the little cold fingers with lips that trembled. "No, my love, my darling, not that—but I will go to town to-morrow and settle how we can be married—at once, without an hour's delay. Oh, yes, it is possible, dear—quite possible. It is the only thing to do. Why, why did I not think of it before? I will go and settle everything, and get the licence. That is the way. My darling, you must not say a word. You had made up your mind to marry me some time, and why not to-morrow —next day—as soon as I can settle? What should we wait for? who should we think of except ourselves? And I want you, my love; and you, thank heaven, Lottie, have need of me."

He held her close to him, in a grasp which was almost fierce—fierce in the strain of virtue and honour, in which his own nature, with all its easy principles and vacillations, was caught too. He wanted to be off and do it at once, without losing a moment, lest his heart should fail. He would do it, whatever might oppose. She should never know that less worthy thoughts had been in his mind. She should find that her trust was not vain. His blood ran in his veins like a tumultuous river, and his heart beat so that Lottie herself was overawed by the commotion as he held her against it. She was half frightened by his vehemence and tried to speak, but he would not let

her at first. "No," he said, "no, you must not say anything. You must not oppose me. It must be done first, and then we can think of it after. There is nothing against it, and everything in its favour. You must not say a word but Yes," he cried.

"But, Rollo, Rollo, let me speak. It might be good for me, but would it not be wrong for you? Oh, let me speak! Am I so selfish that I would make you take a sudden resolution, perhaps very foolish, perhaps very imprudent, for my sake? Rollo, Rollo, don't! I will bear anything. It would be wrong for you to do this."

"No; not wrong, but right—not wrong, but right," he cried, bewildering her with his vehemence. Lottie's own heart was stirred, but not like this. She wondered and was troubled, even in the delight of the thought that everything in the world was as nothing to him in comparison with his love for herself.

"But, Rollo," she cried again, trembling in his grasp, "if this is really possible—if it is not wrong—why should you go to London to do it? It would be quite as easy here——"

"Lottie, you will sacrifice something for me, will you not?" he said. "If it were done here, all would be public; it would be spoken of everywhere; and I want it to be quiet. I have not much money. You will make this *sacrifice* for me, dear——"

"Oh," said Lottie, compunctious, "I wish I had said nothing about it; I wish I had not disturbed you with my paltry little troubles. Do not think of them any more. I can bear anything when I know you are thinking of me. It was only yesterday when—when all seemed uncertain, that it seemed more than I could bear."

"And it is more than you ought to bear," he said. "No, I am glad that you told me. We will go away, Lottie—to Italy, to the sunshine, to the country of music, where you will learn best of all—we will go away from the very church door."

And then he told her how it could be done. To-morrow he would go and settle everything. His plans all took form with lightning speed, though he had never thought of them till now. There would be many things to do; but in three days from that time he would meet her in the same place, and tell her all the arrangements he had made:—and the next morning after that ("Saturday is a lucky day," he said) they would go to town, if not together, yet by the same train—and go to the church, where he would have arranged everything. Rollo Ridsdale was an adventurer born. He was used to changing the conditions of his life in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. But it all seemed a dream to Lottie—not one of her usual waking dreams, but a dream of the night, with no

possibility in it, which would dissolve into the mists presently and leave nothing but a happy recollection. She acquiesced in everything, being too much taken by surprise to oppose a plan in which he was so vehement.

"May I tell Law?" she asked, always in her dream, not feeling as if there was any reality in the idea she suggested. And he said No at first, but afterwards half relented, and it was agreed that on Friday everything was to be decided, but nothing done till then. Thus, though they had met without a thought that this stolen interview would be more decisive than any other of the same kind, they parted with a decision that concerned their entire lives.

They walked closer together after this, in the safe gloom of the darkness, till they had again reached the door of the cloisters which led to the Deanery. No one was about, and Rollo was full of restless excitement. He would not hear what she said about prudence, and walked across with her to her own door. There was not a creature to be seen up or down; the lamps flickered in the cold wind, and all the population had gone in to the comfort of warm rooms and blazing fires. He kissed her hand tenderly as he took leave of her.

"Till Friday," he said.

Lottie went *in*, still in her dream, walking, she

thought, in her sleep. She hoped this sleep would last for ever—that it might not be rashly disturbed by waking, or even by that which would be almost as bad as waking—*coming true.* She could scarcely feel that she wanted it to come true; it was enough as it was, a bewildering happiness that tingled to the very ends of her fingers, that made her feel as if she were walking on air. She went softly upstairs, caring for nothing but to get to her room, where, though it was dark and cold, she could still go on with this wonderful vision. That seemed all she wanted. But, alas! something very different was in store for Lottie. As she went with soft steps up the stairs the door of the little drawing-room was suddenly opened, letting out a warm stream of ruddy light. Then a sound of laughter reached her ears, and Polly's voice——

"Come in, come in; we are waiting for you; we are both here," with another gay outburst.

Lottie came to herself, and to all the disagreeable realities of her life, with a start of pain. She had to obey, though nothing could be more disagreeable to her. She went in with dazzled eyes into the room full of firelight. She remembered now that she had remarked outside that no lamp was lighted, and had supposed with relief that Mrs. Despard was out. But Mrs. Despard had not been out. She had been lurking in the ruddy gloom near the window, her husband by

her side. They greeted Lottie with another laugh, as she came in with her pale, astonished face within the circle of the fire.

"So that's how you spend your afternoons, miss, as I never could think where you were," cried Polly; "but why didn't you bring in your beau with you? I'd have given him his tea and a nice leg of a goose, as comfortable as could be."

"My child," said the Captain on his side, "I congratulate you. I've been expecting something of this kind for a long time. I've had my eye upon you. But why didn't you bring Mr. Ridsdale in, as Mrs. Despard says?"

Lottie felt as if she had been turned into stone. She stood all dark in her winter dress, the firelight playing upon her, and seeking in vain to catch at some possibility of reflection. She had not even a button that would give back the light. And she had not a word to say.

"Come, come, you need not be so put out," said the Captain, not unkindly. "We saw you coming; and very proper of Mr. Ridsdale not to leave you at the Deanery, but to see you home to your own door. You thought no one was paying any attention—but I hope," Captain Despard added, "that I think more than that of my child. I don't doubt from what I saw, Lottie, *that you* understand each other; and why

hasn't he come before now to speak to me? You might have known that such a suitor would not be received unfavourably. Happy myself," said the Captain, throwing out his chest, "would I have put any obstacle between you and your happiness, my dear?"

"I did not think—I did not know—I think—you are mistaken," Lottie faltered, not knowing what to say.

"Mistaken, indeed! Oh, we've gone through all that too lately to be mistaken, haven't we, Harry?" cried Mrs. Despard. "We know all about it. You couldn't come to those as would understand you better. Don't be frightened; you haven't been found out in anything wrong. If that was wrong I've a deal to answer for," Polly cried, laughing. "I should think you must be frozen with cold after wandering about on them Slopes, or wherever you have been. How foolish young people are, to be sure, getting their deaths of cold. We never were as foolish as that, were we, Harry? Come and warm yourself, you silly girl. You needn't be afraid of him or me."

Amid their laughter, however, Lottie managed to get away, to take off her hat, and to try as best she could to realise this new phase of the situation. What her father had said was very reasonable. Why had not Rollo come, as the Captain said? How that would

have simplified everything, made everything legitimate! She sighed, not able to understand her lover, feeling that for once her father was right; but Rollo had said that this could not be, that it would be necessary to keep everything quiet. Her dream of happiness was disturbed. Dreams are better, so much better, than reality. In them there is never any jar with fact and necessity; they can adapt themselves to everything, fit themselves into every new development. But now that she was fully awoke it was less easy to steer her way through all the obstacles. Rollo's reluctance to declare himself, and her father's right to know, and the pain of leaving her home in a clandestine way, all rushed upon her, dispersing her happiness to the winds. She had felt that to awake would be to lose the sweetness which had wrapped her about; and now the rude encounter with the world had come, and Lottie felt that even with that prospect of happiness before her it was difficult to bear what she would have to bear;—Polly's innuendoes and, worse still, Polly's sympathy, and the questions of her father appalled her as she looked forward to them. During this strange courtship of hers, so perplexed and mixed up as it was with her music and the "career" which they all, even Rollo, had tried to force upon her (though surely there need be no more of that *now*), and the changes that had taken place at home, Lottie had almost lost herself. She

was no longer the high-spirited girl, full of energy and strength, who had reigned over this little house and dragged Law's heavy bulk along through so many difficulties. She had dreamed so much, and taken refuge so completely from the troubles of her position in those dreams, that now she seemed to have lost her own characteristics, and had no vigour to sustain her when she had actual difficulties to face. She tried to recall herself to herself as she smoothed her hair, which had been blown about by the breeze. From the beginning she had been pained by Rollo's reserve, though she had persuaded herself it was natural enough; but now, in this new, strange revolution of affairs—a revolution caused entirely, she said to herself, by her father's own proceedings—what could she do but stand firm on her own side? She would not betray the great purpose in hand. She would still her own heart, and keep her composure, and not allow any agitation or any irritation to wrest from her the secret which Rollo desired to keep. To smooth her ruffled hair was not generally a long process with Lottie; but it was more difficult to arrange her agitated thoughts, and there had been various calls for her from below, where the others had gone for their evening meal, before she was ready to follow.

Finally Law was sent upstairs with an urgent demand for her presence.

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Polly and the Captain were seated at table when the two younger members of the family went in, and never had Captain Despard been more dignified or genial. "Lottie, my child, a bit of the breast," he said—"a delicate bit just fit for a lady. I've saved it up for you, though you are late. You are very late; but for once in a way we will make allowances, especially as Mrs. Despard is not offended, but takes your side."

"Oh, *I* know," said Polly, "I am not one as is hard upon natural feelings. Pride I can't abide, nor stuck-up ways, but when it comes to keeping company——"

"Is anyone keeping company with Lottie?" said Law, looking up fiercely; and then the elder pair laughed.

"But, my love, it is not a phrase that is used in good society," the Captain said.

"Oh, bother good society!" said Polly. She was in an exuberant mood, and beyond the influence of that little topdressing of too transparent pretence with which occasionally she attempted to impose upon her step-children. Lottie, in whose mind indignation and disgust gradually overcame the previous self-absorption, listened to every word, unable to escape from the chatter she hated, with that keen interest of dislike and impatience which is more enthralling than affec-

tion; but she scarcely ventured to raise her eyes, and kept herself rigidly on her guard lest any rash word should betray her. It was not till the meal was over that she was brought to actual proof. Then her father detained her as she was about to escape. Law, more impatient than ever with the pressure of his own affairs, which it seemed impossible to find any opportunity of confiding to his sister, had got up at once and gone out. The Captain threw out his chest majestically and waved his hand as Lottie was about to follow.

"My child, I have got something to say to you," he said.

Mrs. Despard was standing by the fire, warming herself with frank ease, with a good ankle well displayed. Lottie, on her way to the door, unwillingly arrested, stood still because she could not help it. But the Captain occupied with majesty his seat at the foot of the table between his wife and his daughter. "My love," he said, with his favourite gesture, throwing back his well-developed shoulders, "I have every faith in my daughter, and Mr. Ridsdale is in every way quite satisfactory. Your family is as good as his, but my Lord Courtland's son is not one to be turned away from any door; and as you have no fortune, Lottie, I should not be exacting as to settlements. I suppose he knows that you have no fortune, my dear?"

"La, Harry!" said Polly from the side of the fire,

"how should he think she had a fortune? Fortunes don't grow on every tree. And how do you know as he has got *that* far? A young man may keep company with a girl for long enough, and yet never go as far as *that*."

"You must allow me to know best, my love," said the Captain. "I hope he is not trifling with my girl's affections. If he is he has Harry Despard to deal with, I'd have him to know. By Jove, if I thought *that*!"

"I dare say it's nothing but keeping company," said Polly, holding up her foot to the fire. "Taking a walk together, or a talk; there's nothing wrong in that. She wants her bit of fun as well as other girls. I'm not the one to stand up for Miss Lottie, for it's not what she'd do for me; but if it's only her bit of fun you shouldn't be hard upon her, Harry; if my pa had hauled me up for that——"

Lottie could not bear it any longer. "Do you wish me to stay," she said, "papa? can you wish me to stay?" The Captain looked from his wife in her easy attitude to his daughter, pale with indignation and horror.

"My love," he said, with mild remonstrance, "there are different ways of speaking in different spheres. Lottie is an only daughter, and has been very carefully brought up. But, my child," the Captain added, turning to Lottie, "you must not be neglected now. I make it my business to-morrow to see Mr. Ridsdale

scertain what his intentions are. Your interests shall ot suffer from any carelessness."

"Papa," cried Lottie in despair, "you will not do nything so cruel; you could not treat me so! Wait—nly wait—a few days—three or four days!"

Polly was so much interested that she let her dress rop over her ankles and turned round. "Don't you ee," she said, "that she feels he's coming to the point ithout any bother? That's always a deal the best ay. It can't do no harm, as I can see, to wait for ree or four days."

"By Jove, but it will, though," said Captain Desard with sudden impatience, "all the harm in the orld. You'll allow me to understand my own busiess. It is clearly time for a man to interfere. I shall ee Mr. Ridsdale to-morrow, if all the women in the orld were to try their skill and hold me back. Hold our tongue, Mrs. Despard; be quiet, Lottie. When a nan is a husband and a father he is the best judge of is own duties. It is now my time to interfere."

Polly was really concerned; she had a fellow feeling or the girl whose rights were thus interfered with. Don't you mind," she said, turning to Lottie with a alf-audible whisper. "If he's coming to the point imself it won't do no harm, and if he ain't it will ive him a push, and let him see what's expected of im. I ain't one for interfering myself, but if you

can't help it you must just put up with it; and I don't think, after all, it will do so very much harm."

Now Lottie ought to have been grateful for this well-intentioned and amiable remark, but she was not. On the contrary, her anger rose more wildly against the stranger who thus attempted to console her, than it did against her father, whose sudden resolution was so painful to her. She gave Polly a look of wrath, and, forgetting even civility, darted out of the room and upstairs in vehement resentment. Polly was not so much angry as amazed to the point of consternation. She gasped for the breath which was taken away by Lottie's sudden flight. "Well!" she exclaimed, "that's manners, that is! that's what you call being brought up careful! A young unmarried girl, as is nothing and nobody, rushing out of a room like that before a married lady and her Pa's wife!"

Lottie, however, was in a passion of alarm, which drove everything else out of her head. Of all things that seemed to her most to be avoided, a meeting between her father and Rollo at this crisis was the worst. She left her room no more that evening, but sat and pondered what she could do to avert the danger. True, without a meeting between them it would be impossible that her love should have its legitimate sanction, and that the beginning of her new life should be honest and straightforward, as it ought. But partly

because she had schooled herself to think (by way of excusing Rollo's silence) that a meeting between him and her father would only make him less respectful of the Captain's pretensions and the "family" which Lottie still with forlorn faith believed in, and partly because the visit of a father to ask a lover's "intentions" was perhaps the very last way in which a beginning of intercourse could be agreeably established, it seemed to Lottie that she would do anything in the world to prevent this meeting. With this view she wrote one little note and then another to warn Rollo —writing with cold fingers but a beating heart, hot with anxiety and trouble, upon the corner of her little dressing-table—for there was no room for any other convenience of a table in the small, old-fashioned chamber. But when she had at last achieved a composition of one which seemed to express feebly yet sufficiently what she wanted to say, the question arose, How was it to get to Rollo? She had no one to send. She dared not trust it to Law, for that would involve an explanation, and there was no one else at Lottie's command. A thought of Captain Temple floated across her mind; but how could she employ him upon such an errand, which would involve a still more difficult explanation? At last she burnt regretfully by the flame of her candle the very last of these effusions, and decided *that she* must trust to the chances of the

w. She had promised to be at the elm-tree in
norning to bid Rollo good-by. She must manage,
, to get him to go away before matins were over
d her father free. But it was with an anxious heart
at Lottie, when her candle burned out, crept cold
nd troubled to bed, chilled to the bone, yet with a
brow which burned and throbbed with excitement.
Law did not come in till after she had fallen asleep.
Law, whom she had watched over so anxiously, was,
at this crisis of Lottie's personal history and his own,
left entirely to himself.

In the morning she managed to run out im-
mediately after breakfast, just as the air began t
vibrate with the Abbey bells, and, after some anxi
waiting under the elm, at last, to her great relief,
Rollo coming. Lottie was not able to disguis
anxiety or her desire for his departure. "Never
speaking to me," she said. "Do not waste tim
Rollo, forgive me—no, it is not to get rid of y
cried, and then she told him the incider
night.

Rollo's eyes gave forth a gleam of disgu
heard of the chance of being stopped by
pard to enquire his "intentions." He
Lottie thought instinctively that this w
merriment which she would never wish
But his face brightened as he turne

was so anxious to save him from this ordeal. "My faithful Lottie!" he said, pressing her close to him. There was nobody stirring in the winterly morning; but yet day requires more reserve than the early darkness of night.

"But go, go, Rollo. I want you to be gone before they are out of the Abbey," she cried, breathless.

"My dear love—my only love," he said, holding both her hands in his.

"Oh, Rollo, is it not only for a day or two? You are so serious, you frighten me—but go, go, that you may not meet anyone," she said.

"Yes, it is only for a day or two, my darling," he replied. "On Friday, my Lottie, at five under this tree. You won't fail me?"

"Never," she said, with her blue eyes full of sweet tears. And then they kissed in the eye of day, all the silent world looking on.

"No," he said, with fervour—"never; you will never fail me; you will always be true."

And so they parted, she watching jealously while he took his way, not by the common road, but down the windings of the Slopes, that he might be safe, that no one might annoy him. "Till Friday!" he called to her in the silence, waving his hand as he turned the corner out of her sight. She drew a long breath of relief when she *saw* him emerge alone farther down

upon the road that led to the railway. The Signor was only then beginning the voluntary, and Captain Despard evidently could not ask Rollo Ridsdale his "intentions" that day. Lottie waved her hand to her lover, though he was too far off to see her, and said to herself, "Till Friday," with a sudden realisation all of these words implied—another life, a new heaven and a new earth; love, and tenderness, and worship instead of the careless use and wont of the family; to be first instead of last; to be happy and at rest instead of tormented at everybody's caprice; to be with Rollo, who loved her, always, for ever and ever, with no more risk of losing him or being forgotten. Her heart overflowed with sweetness, her eyes with soft tears of joy. Out of that enchanted land she went back for a little while into common life, but not in any common way. The sunshine, which had been slow to shine, broke out over the Dean's Walk as she emerged from under the shadow of the trees; the path was cleared for her; the music pealed out from the Abbey. Unconsciouly her steps fell into a kind of stately movement, keeping time. In her blessedness she moved softly on towards the shadow of the house in which she had now but a few days to live—like a princess walking to her coronation, like a martyr to her agony. Who could tell in which of the two the best similitude lay?

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE EFFECT OF GOOD FORTUNE: LAW.

Law had left Mr. Ashford, not knowing, as the vulgar have it, if he stood on his head or his heels. He had somewhat despised the Minor Canon, not only as a clergyman and an instructor, intending to put something into Law's luckless brains, yet without force enough to do it effectually, but as a man, much too mild and gentle to make any head against the deceitfulness of mankind, and all those guiles and pretences in which an unwilling student like Law knows himself so much more profoundly informed than any of his pastors and teachers can be. The sense of superiority with which such a youth, learned in all manner of "dodges" and devices for eluding work, contemplates the innocent senior who has faith in his excuses, was strong in Law's mind towards his last tutor, who was so much less knowing than any of the others, that he had taken him "for nothing," without even the pay which his earlier instructor, Mr. Langton, had been supposed to receive: supposed—for Captain Despard was paymaster, and he was not any more to be trusted

to for recollecting quarter-day than Law was to be trusted to for doing his work. But Mr. Ashford had never said anything about pay. He had taken Law for his sister's sake, "for love," as the young man said lightly; taken him as an experiment, to see what could be made of him, and kept him on without a word on either side of remuneration. This curious conduct, which might have made the pupil grateful, had no such result, but filled him instead with a more entire contempt for the intellects of his benefactor. It is easy, in the estimation of young men like Law, to be learned and wise in book-learning, yet a "stupid" in life; and if anything could have made this fact more clear, it would have been the irregularity of the business transaction as between a non-paying pupil and a "coach" who gave just as much attention to him as if he had been an important source of revenue. "What a soft he must be! What a stupid he is," had been Law's standing reflection. But he had liked all the same the object of his scorn, and had felt "old Ashford" to be "very jolly," notwithstanding his foolish believingness, and still more foolish indifference to his own profit. It was this which had made him go to the Minor Canon with such a frankness of appeal—but he had not been in the least prepared for the reply he received. It took away his breath. Though it was a superlative proof of the same "softness" which had

made Mr. Ashford receive a pupil who paid him nothing, the dazzled youth could no longer regard it with contempt. Though he was tolerably fortified against invasions of emotion, there was something in this which penetrated to his heart. Suddenly, in a moment, to be lifted out of his dull struggle with books which he could not understand, and hopeless anticipation of an ordeal he could never pass, and to have the desire of his heart given to him, without any trouble of his, without price or reward, was all very wonderful to Law. At first he could not believe it. To think "old Ashford" was joking—to think that a man so unpractical did not put the ordinary meaning into his words—this was the first natural explanation; but when the Minor Canon's first recollection that "he knew a man" brightened into the prospect of money to pay the young emigrant's passage, and an actual beginning of his career, Law did not know, as we have said, whether he was standing upon solid ground or floating in the air. The happiness was almost too much for him. He went up to London next day by Mr. Ashford's suggestion, and, at his cost, to learn all particulars about the voyage, but kept his own secret until it had gained so much of solid foundation as the actual sight of a ship which was bound for Australia, a printed account of the times of sailing, and fares, and an outfitter's list of indispensables, could give; then, still dazzled by

the sudden fulfilment of his wishes, but feeling his own importance, and the seriousness of his position as a future emigrant, Law had endeavoured to find an opportunity of communicating the great news to Lottie, but had failed, as has been seen. And having thus failed, and seeing in her none of the eager desire to know what he was about, which he thought would have been natural in circumstances so profoundly interesting, Law got up from the table and went out with a certain sense of injury in his mind. He saw there was "something up" in respect to his sister herself, but he did not take very much interest in that. Yet he thought it curiously selfish of her, almost incomprehensibly selfish, to ask no question, show no concern in what was happening to him. He had said, "I am going to Australia!" but had he said, "I am going to play football," she could not have taken it more calmly; and she had never asked a question since. What funny creatures women are, one time so anxious about you, another time caring nothing, Law said to himself; but he was not at all conscious that it might have been natural for him too to take some interest in Lottie's affairs. He did not. It was some rubbish, he supposed, about that fellow Ridsdale. He thought of the whole business with contempt. Far more important, beyond all comparison, were those affairs which were his own.

And when he went out, a little angry, irritated, but ıll of excitement and elation, and eager to find someody who would take due interest in the story of his ood fortune, where could Law's footsteps stray but to ıe place where they had turned so often in his idleess and hopelessness? He had gone once before ince the visit of Polly, and had been confronted by frs. Welting, now established in the workroom, to the onfusion of all the little schemes of amusement by hich the girls had solaced the tedium of their lives. Mother" had been glad enough to be allowed to look fter her house in quiet, and the rest of the family, ithout troubling herself about her girls. But the harp prick of Polly's denunciation had given Mrs. Velting new ideas of her duty. Would she let it be aid by an artful creature like that, who had done the ame thing herself, as *her* daughters were laying themelves out to catch a gentleman? Not for all the orld! She would not have a girl of hers marry a entleman, not for anything, Mrs. Welting said. She orbade the little expeditions they were in the habit f making in turns for thread and buttons. She would ot allow even the *Family Herald*. She scolded "for othing at all," resenting her compulsory attendance here, and banishment from her domestic concerns. he workroom was quite changed. There was no jolty in it, no visitors, not half so much chatter as had

been carried on gaily while Polly was paramount. "She took all the good herself, but she never could bear seeing anyone else happy," Emma said, who was doubly aggrieved. And it could not be said that the work improved under this discipline. The moment altogether was not happy; and when Law, by dint of wandering about the windows, and whistling various airs known to the workroom, made his presence known, Emma, when her mother withdrew, as she did perforce as the evening got on, and it became necessary to look after the family supper, the younger children, and her lodgers —came cautiously out to meet him, with a cloak about her shoulders. "I haven't got a moment to stay," Emma said. "Mother would take off my head if she found me out!" Yet she suffered herself to be drawn a few steps from the door, and round the corner to the riverside, where, on this wintry evening, there was nobody about, and the river itself in the darkness was only discernible by the white swell and foam round the piers of the bridge, by which it rushed on its headlong passage to the weir. Here, now going now coming, a few wary steps at a time, awaiting possible warning from the window of the lighted work room, the two wandered in the damp darkness, and Emma, opening large eyes of astonishment, heard all that was about to happen. "Old Ashford has behaved like a brick," Law said. "He is going to

me introductions to people he knows, and he means to give me my passage-money too, and something to begin upon!"

"Lor!" cried Emma, "what is it for? Is he going to marry your sister?" Her attention was awakened, but she did not think she had anything to do with it; she was so much afraid of not hearing any possible tap on the window, or not having time to run home before her absence was discovered.

"Now look here, Emma," said Law. He did not speak with any enthusiasm of tenderness, but calmly, as having something serious to propose. "If I go away, you know, it's for life; it's not gone to-day and back to-morrow, like a soldier ordered off to the Colonies. I'm going to make my living, and my fortune, if I can, and settle there for life. No, nobody's knocking at the window. Can't you give me your attention for a moment? I tell you, if I go, it's for life."

"Lor!" said Emma, startled. "You don't mean to say as you've come to say good-bye, Mr. Law? and you as always said you were so true. But I do believe none of you young men ever remembers nor thinks what he's been saying," she added with a half whimper. A lover's desertion is never a pleasant thing in any condition of life.

"It's just because of that I'm here," said Law, sturdily. "I remember all I've ever said. I've come

to put it to you, Emma, straightforward. I am going away, as I tell you, for life. Will you come with me? that's the question. There is not very much to spare, and there's the outfit to get, but it will go hard if I can't draw old Ashford for your passage-money," said the grateful recipient of the Minor Canon's bounty; "and it would be a new start and a new life, and I'd do the best I could for you. Emma, you must make up your mind quick, for there isn't much time. The boat sails—well, I can't exactly tell you when she sails; but in a fortnight or so——"

"A fortnight!" Emma cried, with a sense of dismay.

"Yes. We needn't have a very grand wedding, need we? Emigrants must be careful both of their money and their time."

"Emigrants? I don't know what you mean by emigrants—it don't sound much," said the girl, with a cloud upon her face.

"No, it is not very fine. It means people that are going to settle far away, on the other side of the world. Australia is—I don't know how many thousand miles away."

"Can you go there by land?" said Emma. "You needn't laugh—how was I to know? Oh, I can't abide going in a ship."

"That's a pity, for you can't go in anything else.

But it's a fine big ship, and every care taken. Look here, Emma, you must make up your mind. Will you go?"

"Oh, I don't know," cried Emma; "I can't tell; how long would you be in the ship? It isn't what I ever expected," she said in a plaintive voice. "A hurry, and a fuss, and then a long sea-voyage. Oh, I don't think I should like it, Mr. Law."

"The question is, do you like me?" said Law, with a little thrill in his deep yet boyish bass. "You couldn't like the parting and all that—it wouldn't be natural; but do you like *me* well enough to put up with it? I don't want you to do anything you don't like, but when I go it will be for good, and you must just make up your mind which you like best—to go with me, though there's a good deal of trouble, or to stay at home, and good-bye to me for ever."

At this, Emma began to cry. "Oh, I shouldn't like to say good-bye for ever," she said; "I always hated saying good-bye. I don't know what to do; it would be good-bye to mother, and Ellen, and them all. And never to come back again would be awful! I shouldn't mind if it was for a year or two years, but never to come back—I don't know what to do."

"We might come home on a visit, if we got very rich," said Law, "or we might have some of the others out to see us."

"Oh, for a visit!" said Emma. "But they'd miss me dreadful in the workroom. Oh, I wish I knew what to say."

"You must choose for yourself—you must please yourself," said Law, a little piqued by the girl's many doubts; then he softened again. "You know, Emma," he said, "when a girl gets married it's very seldom she has her own people near her, and I don't know that it's a good thing when she has. People say, at least, husband and wife ought to be enough for each other. And, supposing it was only to London, it would still be away from them."

"Oh, but it would be different," cried Emma; "if one could come back now and again, and see them all; but to live always hundreds of thousands of miles away."

"Not hundreds of thousands; but a long voyage that takes months——"

"Months!" Emma uttered a cry. "Too far to have mother if you were ill," she said, casting her mind over the eventualities of the future; "too far, a deal too far for a trip to see one. I don't think it would be nice at all. Mr. Law, couldn't you, oh, couldn't you stop at home?"

"Perhaps you'd tell me what I should do if I stayed at home," said Law, not without a touch of contempt. "It's more than I can tell. No, I can't stay at home.

There is nothing I could do here. It is Australia or nothing, Emma; you must make up your mind to that."

"Oh, but I don't see why you shouldn't stay in London; there are always places to be got there; you might look in the papers and see. Mother used to get the *Times* from the public-house, a penny an hour, when Willie was out of a place. Did you ever answer any advertisement, or try—really try?"

"All that is nothing to the purpose," said Law, with some impatience. "The advertisements may be all very well, but I know nothing about them. I am going to Australia whether or not. I've quite made up my mind. Now the thing is, will you come too?"

Emma did not know what answer to make. The going away was appalling, but to lose her gentleman-lover, though he was banished from the workroom, was a great humiliation. Then she could not but feel that there was a certain excitement and importance in the idea of preparing for a sudden voyage, and being married at seventeen, the first of the family. But when she thought of the sea and the ship, and the separation from everything, Emma's strength of mind gave way. She could not do that. The end was that, driven back and forward between the two, she at last faltered forth a desire to consult "Mother" before deciding. Law, though he was contemptuous of this

weakness, yet could not say anything against it. Perhaps it was necessary that a girl should own such a subjection. "If you do, I can tell you beforehand what she will say," he cried. "Then Ellen; I'll ask Ellen," said Emma. "Oh, I can't settle it out of my own head." And then the girl started, hearing the signal on the window, and fled from him, breathless. "Mother's come to shut up," she said. Law walked away, not without satisfaction, when this end had been attained. He was more anxious to have the question settled than he was anxious to have Emma. Indeed, he was not at all blind to the fact that he was too young to marry, and that there were disadvantages in hampering himself even in Australia with such a permanent companion. Then, too, all that he could hope for from Mr. Ashford was enough for his own outfit and passage, and he did not see how hers was to be managed. But, still, Law had been "keeping company" with Emma for some time, and he acknowledged the duties of that condition according to the interpretation put upon it in the order to which Emma belonged. Clearly, when good fortune came to a young man who was keeping company with a young woman, it was right that he should offer her a share of it. If she did not accept it, so much the better; he would have done what honour required without any further trouble. As Law walked up the hill again, he reflected

that on the whole it would be much better if he were allowed to go to Australia alone. No one could know how things would turn out. Perhaps the man Mr. Ashford knew might be of little use, perhaps he might have to go from one place to another; or he might not succeed at first; or many things might happen which would make a wife an undesirable burden. He could not but hope that things might so arrange themselves as that Emma should drop back into her natural sphere in the workroom, and he be left free. Poor little Emma! if this were the case, he would buy her a locket as a keepsake off Mr. Ashford's money, and take leave of her with comfort. But in the other case, if she should make up her mind to go with him, Law was ready to accept the alternative. His good fortune put him doubly on his honour. He would prefer to be free, yet, if he were held to it, he was prepared to do his duty. He would not let her perceive that he did not want her. But, on the whole, he would be much better satisfied if "Mother" interfered. Having disposed of this matter, Law began to think of his outfit, which was very important, wondering, by the way, if Emma went, whether her family would provide hers? but yet keeping this question, as uncertain, quite in the background. He recalled to himself the list he had got in his pocket, with its dozens of shirts and socks, with *no small* satisfaction. Was it possible that

he could become the owner of all that? The thought of becoming the owner of a wife he took calmly, hoping he might still avoid the necessity; but to have such a wardrobe was exciting and delightful. He determined to get Lottie to show him how to mend a hole and sew on a button. To think that Lottie knew nothing about his plans, and had never asked him what he meant, bewildered him when he thought of it. What could be "up" in respect to her? Something like anxiety crossed Law's mind; at least, it was something as much like anxiety as he was capable of—a mingling of surprise and indignation; for were not his affairs a great deal more important than anything affecting herself could be? This was the idea of both. Law was going to Australia, but Lottie was going to be married, a still more important event! and each felt that in heaven and earth no other such absorbing interest existed. It must be said, however, for Lottie, that Law's whispered communication counted for nothing with her, since she knew no way in which it could be possible. Wild hopes that came to nothing had gleamed across his firmament before. How could he go to Australia? As easy to say that he was going to the moon; and in this way it took no hold upon her mind; while he, for his part, had no clue whatever to the disturbing influence in Lottie's thoughts.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE EFFECT OF GOOD FORTUNE: ROLLO.

THE night after that decisive talk upon the Slopes was a trying one for Rollo Ridsdale. He went home with the fumes of his resolution in his mind. Now the die was cast. Whatever prudence might say against it, the decision was made, and his life settled for him, partly by circumstances, but much more by his personal will and deed. And he did not regret what he had done. It was a tremendous risk to run; but he had confidence that Lottie's voice was as good as a fortune, and that in the long run there would be nothing really imprudent in it. Of course it must be kept entirely "quiet." No indiscreet announcements in the newspapers, no unnecessary publicity must be given to the marriage. Whosoever was absolutely concerned should know; but for the general public, what did it matter to them whether the bond which bound a man of fashion to a celebrated singer was legitimate or not? Lottie would not wish for society, she would not feel the want of society, and particularly in the interval, while she was still not a celebrated singer, it

was specially necessary that all should be kept "quiet." He would take her to Italy, and it would be not at all needful to introduce any stray acquaintance who might happen to turn up, to his wife. In short, there was no occasion for introducing anyone to her. Lottie would not want anything. She would be content with himself. Poor darling! what wonderful trust there was in her! By this time he was able to half-laugh at his own guilty intention, which she had so completely extinguished by her inability to understand it, her perfect acceptance of it as all that was honourable and tender. He was going to do the right thing now —certainly the right thing, without any mistake about it; but still that it should be made to look like the wrong thing, was the idea in Rollo's mind. He would take her to Italy and train her for her future career; but neither at the present time nor in the future would it be necessary to put the dots upon the i's in respect to her position. As for Lottie, he knew very well that she, having no doubt about her position, would not insist upon any publication of it. It would never once occur to her that there was any possibility of being misconstrued.

With these thoughts in his mind, Rollo dressed very hastily for dinner, as he had lingered with Lottie to the last moment. And as it happened, this was the very evening which Augusta chose for discussing

openly the subject to which she had, without speaking of it, already devoted all her powers of research since she had arrived at home. In the evening after dinner Rollo was the only one of the gentlemen who came into the drawing-room. Augusta's husband was an inoffensive and silent man, with what are called "refined tastes." For one thing he was in a mild way an antiquary. He did not enter very much into his wife's life, nor she into his. She was fashionable, he had refined tastes; they were perfectly good friends; and though not yet married six months, followed each their own way. Spencer Daventry had gone to his father-in-law's study accordingly, to investigate some rare books, and his wife was in the drawing-room alone—that is, not exactly alone, for Lady Caroline was "on the sofa." When Lady Caroline was on the sofa she did not trouble anybody much, and even the coming in of the lamps had not disturbed her. She had "just closed her eyes." Her dress was carefully drawn over her feet by Mrs. Daventry's care, and a wadded *couvre-pied* in crimson satin laid over them. Augusta liked to see to every little decorum, and would have thought the toe of her mother's innocent shoe an improper revelation. Perhaps it was by her orders that Mr. Daventry had not come in. There was no company that evening, and when Rollo entered the drawing-room, he saw at once that he had fallen

into a trap. Augusta sat on a comfortable chair by the fire, with a small table near her and a lamp upon it. The other lights were far away, candles twinkling in the distance on the piano, and here and there against the walls: but only this one spot by the fire in warm and full light; and a vacant chair stood invitingly on the other side of Augusta's table. No more snug arrangement for a *tête-à-tête* could have been, for Lady Caroline was nothing but a bit of still life—more still almost than the rest of the furniture. Augusta looked up as her cousin came in, with a smile.

"Alone?" she said; "then come here, Rollo, and let us have a talk."

Rollo would not have been Rollo if he had felt any repugnance to this amusement. Needless to say that in their boy and girl days there had been passages of something they were pleased to call love between the cousins; and equally needless to add that all this had long been over, both being far too sensible (though one had been led astray by Lottie, to his own consternation and confusion) to think of any serious conclusion to such a youthful folly. Rollo sat down with mingled pleasure and alarm. He liked a confidential talk with any woman; but in this case he was not without fear.

And his fears were thoroughly well founded as it

turned out. After a few preliminaries about nothing at all, Augusta suddenly plunged into her subject.

"I am very glad," she said, "to have a chance of speaking to you, by ourselves. Mamma does not pay any attention; it is quite the same as if she were not there. You know I've always taken a great interest in you, Rollo. We are cousins, and we are very old friends—more like brother and sister."

"I demur to the brother and sister; but as old friends as memory can go," said he; "and very happy to be permitted all the privileges of a cousin—with such a good fellow as Daventry added on."

"Oh, yes. Spencer's very nice," said she. "He takes very kindly to my people; but it is not about Spencer I want to talk to you, Rollo, but about yourself."

"That's so much the better," said Rollo; "for I might not have liked bridal raptures, not being able, you know, Augusta, quite to forget——"

"Oh, that's all nonsense," said Augusta, with the faintest of blushes; "bridal fiddlesticks! People in the world keep clear of all that nonsense, heaven be praised. No, Rollo, it's about yourself. I am very anxious about you."

"Angelic cousin!—but there is no cause for anxiety that I know of in me."

"*Oh, yes, Rollo,* there is great cause of anxiety.

I must speak to you quite frankly. When I was married you had never seen Lottie Despard——"

"Miss Despard!" He repeated the name in a surprised tone and with eyes full of astonishment. He was glad of the opportunity of looking to the buckles of his armour and preparing for the onset; and therefore he made the surprise of the exclamation as telling as he could. "What can she have to do with your anxiety?" he said.

"Yes, Lottie Despard. Oh, she has a great deal to do with it. Rollo, how can you think that any good can come of such a flirtation either to you or the girl?"

"Flirtation, Augusta?"

"Yes, flirtation, or something worse. Why do you always go to her lessons? Oh, I know you always go. She can't sing a bit, poor thing; and it only fills her poor heart with vanity and nonsense; and you meet her when you walk out. Don't contradict me, please. Should I say so, if I had not made quite sure? I know the view you men take of honour. You think when a girl is concerned you are bound to deny everything. So you may be sure I did not say it till I had made quite sure. Now, Rollo, I ask you what can possibly come of anything of this kind? Of course you only mean to amuse yourself; and of course the girl's fault if she gets herself talked about, so

must know as well as I do that there can be nothing in it; but for all that——"

"You take away my breath," said Rollo; "you seem to know so much better than I do the things that have happened or are happening to myself."

"I do," said Augusta, "for I have been thinking about it, and you have not. You have just done what was pleasant at the moment, and never taken any thought. You are doing a great deal of harm to Lottie, poor thing, filling her head with silly fancies, and turning her against people of her own class. And suppose some really *nice* girl were to turn up, some one with money, what would she think of you, dangling for ever after a young woman who is not even in society? I am taking it for granted that it is only a silly flirtation: for as for anything worse," said Augusta, with severity, "it cannot be supposed for a moment that *I* could speak to you of that; but you know very well, Rollo, a man of the world, like you, how very dreadful, how fatal all those sort of entanglements are, even when you don't look at them from a high moral point of view."

"You make me out a pretty character," said Rollo, with an angry smile. "I never knew I was a Lovelace till now."

"Oh, all you men are the same," said Augusta, "if women will let you. Women have themselves to thank

when anything happens, for it is of ten times more importance to them than it is to you. A man is none the worse for things that would ruin a girl for ever. But, still, you are not in a position to be careless of what people say. You have not a penny, Rollo; and I don't believe in your opera. The only way in which you will ever have anything is by a suitable marriage. Suppose that any of your relations were to find a really nice person for you, and you were to spoil it all by a folly like this! That is how I look at it. To ruin yourself for a girl's pretty face! and her voice—when she can't sing a note!"

"Am I to infer that you have got a nice person for me?" said Rollo, furious inwardly, yet keeping his temper, and turning the conversation in this direction by way of diverting it from more dangerous subjects. And then Augusta (drawing somewhat upon her imagination, it must be allowed) told him of a very nice person indeed. Rollo listened, by way of securing his escape; but by and by he got slightly interested, in spite of himself. This really nice girl was coming to the Deanery for two or three days. She had a hundred thousand pounds. She had heard of Rollo Ridsdale, and already "took an interest" in him. It was perhaps partly fiction, for the visit of this golden girl to the Deanery was not by any means settled—but yet there was in it a germ of fact. "It

is an opportunity that never may occur again," Augusta said, like a shop that is selling off. And indeed it was a sale which she would have greatly liked to negotiate, though Rollo was less the buyer than the piece of goods of which sale was to be made.

A hundred thousand pounds! He could not help thinking of it later in the evening, when he smoked his cigar, and as he went to bed. His affairs seemed to him to be managed by some malign and tricky spirit. Just at this moment, when he was pledged to the most imprudent marriage that could be conceived, was it not just his luck that fate should take the opportunity of dangling such a prize before him? A hundred thousand pounds! Why was it not Lottie that had this money? or why, as she had no money, had she been thrown in his way? To be sure she had a voice, which was as good as a fortune, but not equal to a hundred thousand pounds. However, he said to himself, there was no help for it now. All this happened before the brief interview on the hill, which sent him off to town before the hour he intended, and which proved to him, over and over again, her trust in him, which was beyond anything he had ever dreamed of. That she should guard him even from her father, that she should believe in him, to the disdain of every safeguard which the vulgar mind relied on, astonished, confounded, and impressed

his mind beyond description. To deceive her would be the easiest thing in the world, but, at the same time, would it not be the most impossible thing, the last that any man not a villain could do? And there was besides a glimmering perception in Rollo's mind that deception would only be practicable up to a certain point, and that the scorn and horror and indignation with which Lottie would turn upon the criminal who had intended shame to her, would be something as much unlike the ordinary rage of a wronged woman as her trust was beyond the ordinary suspicious smoothness of ordinary belief. Shame and she had nothing to do with each other. She might die in the agony of the discovery, but first her eyes, her lips, the passion of her indignant purity would slay. With a deep regret he thought of the easier tie. Augusta's words had been those of a silly woman when she spoke of fatal entanglements. On the contrary, marriage was the fatal thing. The other—what harm would it have done? None to Lottie in her career; no one would have thought any the worse of her. People would be sure to suppose that something of the kind had occurred in a singer's life, whether it was true or not. It would have done her no harm; and it would not have done Rollo any harm. To think of it as fatal was the greatest folly. On the contrary, they would have been of use to each other

now, and after they would each have been free to consult their own interests. He could not help thinking very regretfully of this so easy, agreeable expedient, which would have been anything but fatal. To be sure, this was not, as Augusta said, a high moral point of view; but Rollo did not pretend to be a moralist. All these thoughts poured through his mind again as he went to London, with the full intention of getting a license for his marriage, and making all the arrangements which would bind Lottie to him as his wife. He was obliged to do this; he could not help himself. Much rather would he have done anything else—taken the other alternative—but it was not possible. There was but this one thing to do—a thing which put it entirely out of his power for ever and ever to consider the claims of any really nice person with a hundred thousand pounds at her disposal. Rollo did not pretend to himself that he took the decisive step with any satisfaction. He was no triumphant bridegroom; but he was a true lover, and not a villain, and regretfully but steadfastly he gave himself up to what he had to do.

It was too late to do anything in respect to the license when he arrived in town, but there were many other things to be settled, in order to make a considerably long absence practicable, and these he arranged in his own mind as he approached his journey's

end. For one thing, he had the funds to provide; and that, as will be readily perceived, was no small matter. He walked out of the railway station, pondering this in his mind. It was a grave question, not one to be lightly solved. He did not want to return to town till the season should have begun. No doubt five months' honeymooning would bore any man, but he felt it to be too important to think of mere personal amusement; and he could always make expeditions himself to more lively places, and get a share of any amusement that might be going, when he had settled down Lottie to her studies, under the best masters that were to be had. All this was quite easily settled; but for an absence of five months, if you have not any income to speak of, it is necessary to have an understanding with your bankers, or somebody else. He meant to try his bankers, for his confidence in Lottie's future success was extreme, and h felt justified in speaking of it as money which h future wife would be entitled to. All these plans l was laying very deliberately in his head, calculati how much he would need, and various other p ticulars, when the face of a man approaching i hansom suddenly struck him. It was Rixon, his fath confidential servant, a man who had been in l Courtland's service as long as anybody could reco What was he doing there? The hansom was dire

its course towards the railway from which Rollo had just come, and Rixon's countenance was of an extreme gravity. What could it mean? Could anything have happened? Rollo saw the hansom pass, but its occupant did not see him. He could not banish from his thoughts the idea that something must have happened—that it was to tell him something, some news more or less terrible that Rixon was on his way to the railway which went to St. Michael's. After a moment's hesitation he turned and went back to the station, not being able to divest himself of this idea. To be sure Rixon might be going somewhere on business of his own; he might be looking grave about his own affairs. Still Rollo turned and went back; in any case it was best to know. The man was standing among several others, waiting to take his ticket for the train, when Rollo re-entered the station; he was getting his money out of his pocket to pay his fare; but looking up as he did this, Rixon started, put his money back, and immediately disengaged himself from the *queue*. It was then a message from home of sufficient importance to be sent by special envoy. Rollo had time to examine this bearer of ill-news as he approached. What but ill-news was ever so urgent? special messengers do not travel about to stray sons of a family with news of birth or bridal. There is but one thing which calls for such state, and that is death. Rollo ran over

all the chances in a moment, in his mind. His father —if it were his father there would be a little delay, a little ready money, more need than ever, and a very good excuse, for keeping everything quiet. It was not absolute want of feeling that suggested this thought. If it was his father there would be many reasons for being sorry. Home, with your brother at the head of affairs, is not home like your father's house. And Lord Courtland, though his second son had worn out his kindness, was still kind more or less. Rollo was not insensible; he felt the dull consciousness of a blow before he received it, as he fixed his eyes upon Rixon's mournful countenance, and the band on his hat.

"What is the matter?" he said, as the man approached. "What has happened? You were going to me? Tell me at once what it is."

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said Rixon, with the perpetual apology of a well-bred servant. "Yes, Sir I was going to St. Michael's. My lord sent me to te you——"

"Thank heaven, that it is not my father! Y mean that my father sent you? That is a relief," s Rollo, drawing a long breath.

"Yes, my—Sir!" said Rixon, with confusion, ' lord is in the enjoyment of perfect health—at lea good as is compatible with the great misfortune catastrophe that has—snatched——"

"What do you mean?" said Rollo. Rixon was fond of long words. He laughed, "You are always mysterious. But if my father is all right——"

"Oh, don't! my—don't, Sir!" said the man, "laughing is not what ought to be on your lips at such a moment. Your brother has had an accident——"

"My brother—Ridsdale? Good heavens! Can't you speak out? What has happened?" said Rollo, with blanched cheeks. Horror, fear, hope, all sprung up within him, indistinguishable the one from the other. The moment seemed a year during which he stood waiting for Rixon's next words.

"It is too true, my lord," said the man, and the address threw around Rollo a sudden gleam of growing light. "Your brother had a terrible accident on the hunting-field. His horse stumbled on King's Mead, at that bad fence by Willowbrook. He was taken up insensible, and died before he could be got home. Things are in a terrible state at Courtlands. I was sent to let your lordship know. My lord would be glad if you would come home at once."

Rollo staggered back, and put himself against the wall. A cold moisture burst out over him. He grew so pale that Rixon thought he was going to faint. The man said afterwards that he could not have believed that Mr. Ridsdale had so much feeling. And partly it was feeling as Rixon thought. For the first moment

the thought that his brother, upon whom fate had always smiled—Ridsdale! *Ridsdale!*—the very impersonation of prosperity and good fortune, should be lying dead, actually dead, at his age, with all his prospects, appalled him. It seemed too much, unnatural, beyond all possibility of belief. Then the blood rushed back through all his veins with a flush and suffusion of sudden heat. The change alarmed the messenger of so much evil and so much good. He put out his hand to support his young master. "My lord, my lord!" he said (they were words which Rixon loved to repeat, and which added to his own dignity as a gentleman's gentleman), "remember your father; now that your lamented brother is gone, all his lordship's trust is in you."

Rollo waved his hand, not caring for the moment to speak. "Let me alone!" he said. "Let me alone! leave me to myself." And it did not take him long to recover and shake off the horrible impression, and realise the astounding change that had occurred. Perhaps it is not possible that the death of a brother, which produces so extraordinary and beneficial a change in the situation and prospects of the next in succession, can be regarded with the natural feeling which such an event uncomplicated by loss or gain of a pecuniary kind calls forth. There was a sudden shock, then a consciousness that something was expected

from him, some show of grief and profound distress; and then a bewildering, overwhelming, stupefying, yet exciting realisation of the change thus suddenly accomplished in himself. He was no longer merely Rollo, a fashionable adventurer, dealing in every kind of doubtful speculation, and legitimatised gambling, a man of no importance to anyone, and free to carry out whatever schemes might come into his head; but now —an altogether different person—Lord Ridsdale, his father's heir; the future head of a great family; a future peer; and already endowed with all the importance of an heir-apparent. The world seemed to go round and round with Rollo, and when it settled again out of the whirling and pale confusion as of an earthquake, it was not any longer the same world. The proportion of things had changed in the twinkling of an eye. The distant and the near had changed places. What was close to him before receded; what was far away became near. In the hurry of his thoughts he could not even think. Pain mingled with everything, with the giddiness of a strange elation, with the bewilderment of a surprise more startling than any that had ever come to him before in all his life. Ridsdale!—he who had always been so smiling and prosperous; he to whom everything was forgiven; whose sins were only peccadilloes; whose lightest schoolboy successes were trumpeted abroad, whose movements were recorded where-

ever he went; it was inconceivable that he should be lying—dead; inconceivable that Rollo, the detrimental, the one in the family whom all disapproved of, should be put in his place, and succeed to all his privileges and exemptions. It did not seem possible. It needed Rixon saying my lord to him at every moment, to make the curious fiction seem true. Rixon got a cab to drive his young master to the other station, by which he must go to Courtlands; and Rollo—leaving all his former life behind him, leaving his license, his marriage, his bride, in the opposite direction, fading into misty spectres—turned his back upon all that had been most important to him half an hour ago, and drove away.

He went through that day like a dream—the whole course of his existence turned into another channel. He got home, rolling up to the familiar door with sensations so different from any that had ever moved him when entering that door before. He looked at it this time with a feeling of proprietorship. It had been his home for all his early life; but now it was going to be *his own*, which is very different. He looked at the very trees with a different feeling, wondering why so many should be marked for cutting down. What had they been doing to want to get rid of so many trees? When he went into the room where his brother lay dead, it was to him as if a waxen image lay there, as if it were

all a skilful scene, arranged to make believe that such a change, one man substituted for another, could be *real*. To Rollo it did not seem to be real. It was the younger son who had died, with all his busy schemes —his plans for the future, his contrivances to get money, and the strange connections which he had formed. Rollo, who was the founder of the new opera, the partner of the bustling manager; it was he who was lying on that bed. All his plans would be buried with him—his Bohemianism, his enterprises, his——. What was it that the poor fool had gone in for, the last of all his undertakings, the thing in which he had been happily arrested ere he could harm himself or embarrass the family?—his love ——. It was when standing by the bed on which his brother lay dead that this thought suddenly darted into the new Lord Ridsdale's mind. He turned away with a half groan. Providence had interposed to prevent that foolish fellow from consummating his fate. He had not yet reached the highest pitch of folly when the blow fell. Something there was which the family had escaped. When the key was turned again in the door, and he went back to another darkened room and heard all about the accident, it was almost on his lips to contradict the speakers, and tell them it was not Ridsdale that was dead. But he did not do so. He preserved his decorum and seriousness. He was "very feeling." Lord

Courtland, who had been afraid of his son's levity, and had trembled lest Rollo, who had never been on very intimate terms with his brother, should show less sorrow than was becoming, was deeply satisfied. "How little we know what is in a man till he's tried," he said to his sister, Lady Beatrice. Lady Courtland, the mother of the young man, was happily long ago dead.

Thus, after setting out in the morning — full of tender ardour, notwithstanding his many doubts—to make the arrangements for his marriage, Rollo found himself at night one of the chief mourners in a house full of weeping. It was late at night when he got to his own room, and was able really to set himself to consider his own affairs. Which were his own affairs? The cares of the head of the family, the earl's heir and right hand—or those strangely different anxieties which had been in the mind of the second son? When he sat down to think it over, once more there came a giddiness and bewilderment over Rollo's being. He seemed scarcely able to force back upon himself the events which had happened at St. Michael's only this morning. The figure of Lottie appeared to him through the mist, far, far away, dimly apparent at the end of a long vista. Lottie. What had he intended to do? He had meant to get a licence for his marriage to her, to arrange how he could get money—if money was to be

had by hook or by crook—to see about the tickets for their journey, to decide where to go to—even to provide travelling-wraps for his bride. All this he had come to London to do only this morning, and now it almost cost him an effort to recollect what it was. He would have been glad to evade the subject, to feel that he had a right to rest after such a fatiguing day; but the revolution in and about him was such that he could not rest. St. Michael's and all its scenes passed before him like dissolving views, fading off into the mist, then rising again in spectral indistinctness. He could not think they belonged to him, or that the central figure in all these pictures was his own. Was it not rather his brother—he who had died? It seemed to Lord Ridsdale that he was settling Rollo's affairs for him, thinking what was best to be done. He had been horribly imprudent, and had planned a still greater imprudence to come, when death arrested him in mid-career; but, Heaven be praised, the heedless fellow had been stopped before he committed himself! Rollo shuddered to think what would have happened had the family been hampered by a wife. A wife! What a fool he had been; what a dream he had been absorbed in; folly, unmitigated, inexcusable; but, thank Heaven, he had been stopped in time. Lottie —that was her name, and she had been very fond of him; poor girl, it would be a great disappointment for

her. Thus Rollo thought, not feeling that he had anything to do with it. It was all over, so completely over, that there was scarcely a struggle in his mind, scarcely any controversy with himself, on the subject. No advocate, heavenly or diabolical, spoke on Lottie's behalf. The whole affair was done with—it was impossible—there was no room even for consideration. For Lord Ridsdale to marry a nameless girl, the highest possibility in whose lot was to become a singer, and who had to be educated before even that was practicable, was not to be thought of. It was a bad thing for the poor girl; poor thing! no doubt it was hard upon her.

Thus—was it any doing of Rollo's? Providence itself opened a door of escape for him from his unwary folly. Law did not act in the same way; when good fortune came to him, by a mere savage and uncultivated sentiment of honour, he had gone to the girl who had been his sweetheart to propose that she should share it. Lord Ridsdale, however, was not of this vulgar strain. The savage virtues were not in his way—they were not possible in his circumstances. *Noblesse oblige;* he could not raise Lottie to the sublime elevation of the rank he had so unexpectedly fallen into. That was not possible. The matter was so clear that it barred all question. There was not a word to be said on her side.

Nevertheless, had it not been for all the trouble about poor Ridsdale's funeral, and the attentions required by the father, whose manner had so entirely changed to his surviving son, and who was now altogether dependent upon him—the new heir to the honours of the Courtland family might have broken off with his old love in a more considerate way. But he had no time to think. The very day had come before he could communicate with her; and then it had to be done abruptly. And, after all, a little more or less, what did it matter? The important point, for her sake especially, was that the change should be perfectly definite and clear. Poor Lottie! he was so sorry for her. It would be better, much better for her to hate him now, if she could; and, above all, it was the kindest thing to her to make the disruption distinct, beyond all possibility either of doubt or of hope.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### —"TILL FRIDAY."

CAPTAIN DESPARD put on his best coat after his return from the Abbey on the morning of Rollo's departure. He brushed his hat with more than his usual care; he found, after much investigation, among what he called his papers, an ancient and shabby card-case: and thus equipped set forth on his solemn mission. He had a bit of red geranium in his button-hole which looked cheerful against the damp and gloom of the morning. Polly, looking out after him, thought her Captain a finished gentleman, and felt a swell of pride expand her bosom—of pride and of anxiety as well—for if, by good fortune, the Captain should succeed in his mission, then Polly felt that there would be a reasonable chance of getting "her house to herself." Lottie's proud withdrawal from all the concerns of the house had indeed given her step-mother a great deal less trouble than she had expected; but she could not escape from the idea of Lottie's criticism; and the sight of the girl, sitting there, looking as if she knew better, though she never said anything, was to Polly as

gall and wormwood. If she would have spoken, there would have been less harm. Mrs. Despard was always ready for a conflict of tongues, and knew that she was not likely to come off second best; but Lottie's silence exasperated her; and it was the highest object of her desires to get her house to herself. Lottie was coming down the Dean's Walk, calm, and relieved, and happy, after seeing her lover make his way down the Slopes, when the Captain turned towards the cloisters. Her heart gave a jump of irritation and excitement, followed by a gleam of angry pleasure. This mission, which was an insult to her and to Rollo alike, would be a failure, thank Heaven; but still it was a shame that it should ever have been undertaken. Oh, how unlike, she thought, the perfect trust and faith that was between them, to intrude this vulgar inquiry, this coarse interference, into the perfection of their love! It brought the tears to Lottie's eyes to think how ready he was to throw prudence to the winds for her sake, to accept all the risks of life rather than leave her to suffer; the only question between them being whether it was right for her to accept such a sacrifice. Lottie did not think of the approval of his family as she ought to have done, and as for the approval of her own, though the secret vexed her a little, yet she was glad to escape from the noisy congratulations to which she would have been subjected, and her father's

unctuous satisfaction had her prospects been known. A few days longer, and the new wife whose presence was an offence to Lottie would have her house to herself. The two, upon such opposite sides, used the very same words; Lottie, too, was thankful above measure that Mrs. Despard would have her house to herself. She calculated the days—Wednesday, Thursday, Friday; Friday was the day on which she was to meet him, in the afternoon, while all the world at St. Michael's was at the afternoon service, and when the Signor, on the organ, which had been the accompaniment to all the story of their love, would be filling the wintry air with majestic and tender and solemn sound. She seemed to hear the pealing of that wonderful symphony, and Rollo's voice against it, like a figure standing out against a noble background, telling her all he had done, and when and how the crowning event of their story was to be. Her heart was beating loudly, yet softly, in Lottie's breast. Supreme expectation, yet satisfaction, an agitated calm, a pathetic happiness, feelings too exquisite in their kind to be without a touch of pain, filled all her being. The happiness she had most prized all her life was to have her ideal fulfilled in those she loved; and was it possible that any man could have more nobly done what a true lover should do, than Rollo was doing it? She was happy, in that he loved her above prudence and care and

worldly advantage; but she was almost happier in that this generosity, this tender ardour, this quick and sudden action of the deliverer, was all that poet could have asked or imagination thought of. These were her fancies, poor girl; the fancies of a foolish, inexperienced creature, knowing nothing—and far enough from the truth that the charitable may forgive her, Heaven knows!

When she went in, Polly called her, with a certain imperiousness. She was on her way to her room, that sole bower of safety; but this Mrs. Despard had made up her mind not to allow. "You may show me those scales you were speaking of," said Polly. "I daresay I'll remember as soon as I see them. It will take up your attention, and it will take up my attention till your pa comes back. I'm that full of sympathy (though it can't be said as you deserve it), that though I have nothing to do with it, I am just as anxious as you are."

"I am not anxious," Lottie said proudly; but she would not condescend to say more. She brought out an old music-book with easy lessons for a beginner, at which she had herself laboured in her childhood, and placed it before her scholar. The notes were like Hebrew and Greek to Polly, and she could not twist her fingers into the proper places; these fingers were not like a child's pliable joints, and how to move each

one separately was a problem which she could not master. She sat at the piano with the greatest seriousness, striking a note a minute, with much strain of the unaccustomed hand—and now and then looking up jealously to see if her instructress was laughing at her; but Lottie was too preoccupied to smile. She heard her father coming back in what she felt to be angry haste; and then, with her heart beating, listened to his step upon the stairs. At this Polly too was startled, and jumping up from her laborious exercise, snatched the old music-book from its place and opened it at random at another page.

"Me and Miss Lottie, we've been practising our duet," she said. "La, Harry! is that you back so soon?"

"The fellow's gone," said Captain Despard, throwing down his hat and cane; that hat which had been brushed for nothing, which had not even overawed Mr. Jeremie, who gazed at him superciliously, holding the Deanery door half open, and not impressed at all by the fine manners of the Chevalier. "The fellow's gone! He did not mean to go yesterday, that odious menial as good as confessed. He has heard I was coming, and he has fled. There could not be a worse sign. My poor child! Lottie!" said the Captain, suddenly catching a gleam of something like enjoyment in her eyes, "you do not mean to tell me that you were the

traitor. You! Was it you told him? You may be a fool, but so great a fool as *that* couldn't be!"

Lottie scorned to deny what she had done. She was too proud and too rash to think that she was betraying herself by the acknowledgment. She met her father's eye with involuntary defiance. "You would not listen to me," she said, "and I could not bear it. It was a disgrace; it was humbling me to the dust. I warned him you were coming——" As she spoke she suddenly perceived all that was involved in the confession, and grew crimson-red, and then pale.

"So, miss," said Polly, "you're nicely caught. Keeping company all this time, and never to say a word to nobody; but if I were your pa, you shouldn't be let off like that. Was it for nothing but a bit of fun you've been going on with the gentleman? That's carrying it a deal too far, that is. And when your pa takes it in hand to bring him to the point, you ups and tells him, and frightens him away! I'd just like to know—and, Harry, I'd have you to ask her—what she means by it? What do you mean by it, miss? Do you mean to live on here for ever, and eat us out of house and home? If you won't work for your living, nor do anything to get an 'usband, I'd just like to know what you mean to do?"

"Hold your tongue," said her husband. "Let her alone. It is I that must speak. Lottie, is it really

true that you have betrayed your father? You have separated yourself from me and put yourself on the side of a villain!"

"Mr. Ridsdale is not a villain," said Lottie, passionately. "What has he done? He has done nothing that can give you any right to interfere with him. I told him, because I would not have him interfered with. He has done nothing wrong."

"He has trifled with my child's affections," said the Captain. "He has filled our minds with false expectations. By Jove, he had better not come in the way of Harry Despard, if that's how he means to behave. I'll horsewhip the fellow—I'll kill him; I'll show him up, if he were twenty times the Dean's nephew. And you, girl, what can anyone say to you—never thinking of your own interest, or of what's to become of you, as Mrs. Despard says?"

"Her own interest!" cried Polly. "Oh, she'll take care of herself, never fear. She knows you won't turn her to the door, Harry. You're too soft, and they knows it. They'll hang upon you and eat up everything you have, till you have the courage to tell them as you won't put up with it. Oh, you needn't turn upon me, Miss Lottie. As long as there was a chance of a good 'usband I never said a word; but when you goes and throws your chance away out of wilful pride, then I'm bound to speak. Your poor pa has not a

penny, and all that he has he wants for himself; and I want my house to myself, Harry; you always promised I was to have my house to myself. I don't want none of your grown-up daughters, as think themselves a deal better than me. I think I will go out of my mind with Miss Lottie's lessons, and Mr. Law's lessons, and all the rest. I never would have married you—you know I shouldn't—if I hadn't thought as I was to have my house to myself."

"My love," said the Captain, deprecatingly, "you know it is not my fault. You know that if I could I would give you everything. I had very good reason to think——"

"Papa," said Lottie, who had been standing by trembling, but less with fear than passionate disgust and anger, "do you agree in what she says?"

"Of course he agrees," says Polly. "He hasn't got any choice; he's obliged to say the same as me. He promised me when I married him as you shouldn't be long in my way. He told me as you was going to be married. One girl don't like another girl for everlasting in her road; and you never took no trouble to make yourself agreeable, not even about the music. Harry, do you hear me? Speak up, and say the truth for once. Tell her if she goes on going against me and you, and all we do for her, like this, that you won't have her here."

"My child," said the Captain, who, to do him justice, was by no means happy in his task, "you see me in a difficult position, a most difficult position. What can I say? Mrs. Despard is right. When I married it was my opinion that you, too, would soon make a happy and brilliant marriage. How far that influenced me I need not say. I thought you would be established yourself, and able to help your brother and—and even myself. I'm disappointed, I cannot deny it; and if you have now, instead of fulfilling my expectations, done your best, your very best, to balk——"

The Captain hesitated and faltered, and tried to swagger, but in vain. He had the traditions of a gentleman lingering about him, and Lottie was his child, when all was said, He could not look at her, or meet her eyes; and Lottie, for her part, who could see nothing but from her own side of the question, who did not at all realise his, nor recognise any extenuating circumstances in the plea that he had thought her about to marry, so blazed upon him with lofty indignation as to have altogether consumed her father had he been weak enough to look at her. She did not even glance at Polly, who stood by, eager to rush into the fray.

"In that case," she said, with a passionate solemnity, "you shall be satisfied, papa. A few days and you

hall be satisfied. I will not ask any shelter from you fter—a few days."

Though it was happiness Lottie looked forward to, nd there could no longer in this house be anything ut pain and trouble for her, these words seemed to hoke her. To leave her father's house thus; to make ıe greatest of changes in her life, thus; all Lottie's ense of what was fit and seemly was wounded beyond escription. She turned away, listening to none of the uestions which were showered upon her. "What did he mean? Where was she going? When did she in- end to go? What was she thinking of?" To all ıese Lottie made no reply; she did not even wait to ear them, but swept away with something of the con- cious stateliness of the injured, which it is so hard or youth to deny itself. Heaven knows her heart 'as full enough; yet there was in Lottie's deport- ıent, as she swept out of the room, perhaps a touch f the injured heroine, a suggestion of a tragedy ueen.

She went into her own room, where she found con- ɔlation very speedily in such preparations for her de- arture as she could make. She took out her white ıuslin dress, the simple garment which was so asso- iated with thoughts of Rollo, and spent an hour of ainful yet pleasant consideration over it, wondering ow it could be made to serve for Saturday. Such a

marriage made the toilette of a bride impossible; but Lottie could not bear the thought of standing by her lover's side, and pledging him her faith, in her poor little brown frock which she had worn all the winter past. She thought that, carefully pinned up under her cloak, she might wear this, her only white gown, to be a little like a bride. It had been washed, but it had not suffered much. The folds might be a little stiffer and less flowing than before they had undergone the indignity of starch; but still they were fresh and white, and Lottie did not think it would be noticed that the dress was not new. Perhaps it was more appropriate that in her poverty and desolation she should go to him in the gown she had worn, not in one made new and lovely, as if there were people who cared. "Nobody cares," she said to herself, but without the usual depression which these words convey. She filled up the bodice of her little dress, which had been made open at the throat for evening use, and made it fit close. She put her pearl locket upon a bit of white ribbon. Doing this consoled her for the pangs she had borne. All the money she had of her own was one sovereign, which she had kept from the time her mother's death as a last supreme resource in case of emergency; surely she might use it now. Taking this precious coin from the little old purse in which it was put away, in the deepest corner of an old In

box, purse and box and coin all coming from her mother, Lottie went out to make a few purchases. She was forlorn, but her heart was light. She went down to the great shop not far from the Abbey gates, of which St. Michael's was proud, and bought some tulle and white ribbons. Poor child! her heart yearned for a little sprig of orange-blossom, but she did not venture to ask for anything that would betray her. It seemed to Lottie that she met everybody in the place as she went home with her little parcel in her hand. She met Mr. Ashford, for one, who was greatly surprised that she did not stop to speak to him about Law, and who was, indeed, to tell the truth, somewhat disappointed and chagrined that his liberality to his pupil had as yet met with no response except from that pupil himself. The Minor Canon looked at her wistfully; but Lottie, being full of her own thoughts, did nothing but smile in reply to his bow. Then she met Captain Temple, who, less shy, came to her side eagerly, complaining and upbraiding her that she had deserted him.

"I never see you," said the old man, "and my wife says the same, who takes so much interest in you. We hope, my dear," he said, kind yet half vexed with her, "that all is going better—going well now?"

"Indeed it is not, Captain Temple," Lottie said, tears coming suddenly to her eyes. She could not but

wonder what he would think of her if he knew—if he would disapprove of her; and this sudden thought brought a look of anxiety and sudden emotion into her face.

"My poor child!" cried the old Chevalier. The ready moisture sprang to his eyes also. "Lottie," he said, "my wife takes a great interest in you; she would be very fond of you if she knew you better. Come to us, my dear, and we will take care of you." He said it with the fervour of uncertainty, for he was not sure, after all, how far he could calculate on his wife, and this gave a tremulous heat to his proposition.

But Lottie shook her head and smiled, though the tears were in her eyes. Oh, if she only dared to tell him what was the deliverance which was so near! He went with her to her door, repeating to her this offer of service.

"You might be like our own child," he said. "My wife cannot talk of it—but she would be very fond of you, my dear, when she knew you. If things go on badly, you will come to us?—say you will come to us, Lottie."

And while these words were in her ears, old Mrs. Dalrymple came out to her door, to ask if Lottie would not come in, if she would come to tea—if she would stay with them for a day or two.

"It is only next door, to be sure; but it would be

a change," the old lady said. The ladies in the Lodges had forgiven her for her foolish pride, and for the notice the great people had taken of her, and for all the signs of discontent that Lottie had shown on her first coming to the Abbey. Now that the girl was in trouble they were all good to her, compassionate of her forlorn condition, and making common cause with her against the infliction of the stepmother, who was an insult to every one of them. There was not one Chevalier's wife who was not personally insulted, outraged in her most tender feelings, by the intrusion of Polly, and this quickened their sympathies to the poor girl, who was the most cruelly injured of all.

When Mrs. O'Shaughnessy saw the little group at her neighbour's door, she too came out. "It's her own fault, my dear lady, if she ever eats a meal there," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy; "me and the Major, we are both as fond of her as if she was our own."

Lottie stood amongst them and cried softly, taking care that her tears did not drop upon the little parcel with the tulle, which was connected with still dearer hopes.

"I don't deserve that you should all be so good to me," she said. And indeed it was true; for Lottie had been very haughty in her time to the kind people who forgave her in her trouble.

Thus it was that she shared the dinner of the good

O'Shaughnessys, and only went home in the afternoon, after Polly and the Captain had been seen to go out; when Lottie shut herself up in her room, and with much excitement began the "confection" for which she had bought the materials. It is needless to say that with so little money as she had ever had, Lottie had learnt, *tant bien que mal*, to make most of her own articles of apparel. How she had sighed to have her dresses come home all complete from the dressmaker's, like Augusta Huntington's! but as sighing did no good, Lottie had fitted herself with her gowns, and trimmed her little straw hats, and the occasional bonnet which she permitted herself for going to church in, since ever she was able to use her needle and her scissors. She had never, however, made anything so ambitious as the little tulle bonnet which she meant to be married in. She would have preferred a veil, could anyone doubt? but with no better tiring-room than the waiting-room at the railway, how was she to put herself into a veil? She had to give up that idea with a sigh. But, her pale cheeks glowing with two roses, and her blue eyes lighted up with the fires of invention, she sat all the afternoon, with her door locked, making that bonnet. If she but had a little sprig of orange-blossom to mark what it meant! but here Lottie's courage failed her. *That* she could not venture to buy.

In this way the days glided on till Friday came.

Lottie packed up the things she cared for—the few books, the little trifling possessions of no value, which yet were dear to her to be removed afterwards, and put up her little bonnet (bonnets were worn very small, the fashion books said) in a tiny parcel which she could carry in her hand. Thus all her preparations were made. When she was not in her room making these last arrangements, she was out of doors—in the Abbey or on the Slopes—or with the friends who sought her so kindly, and gave her such meals as she would accept, and would have given her a great many more, overwhelmed her, indeed, with eating and drinking if she would have consented. To some of these Lottie allowed herself the privilege of saying that it was only for a few days she should remain in her father's house. She would not tell where she was going; to friends—yes, certainly to friends; but she would not say any more. This gave great relief to the minds of the Chevaliers generally, except to Captain Temple, who did not like it. The announcement even drew from him something like a reproach to his wife.

"If you had come forward—if you had gone to her when she was in trouble," he said, "we might have had a child again to comfort us." The old Captain was sadly put out, and did nothing but roam about all the day restless and lamenting. He went to the

Signor's to hear what Lottie thought would be her last lesson, and thus bemoaned himself.

"Going away!" the Signor said in great surprise; and Lottie sang so well that day that the musician felt the desertion doubly. She sang fitfully but finely, saying to herself all the time, "To-morrow—to-morrow!" and taking her leave, as she supposed, joyfully, regretfully of Art. That day Lottie thought nothing whatever about Art. Her spirit was moved to its very depths. To-morrow the man whom she loved was coming to take her away from all that was petty, all that was unlovely in her life. From the hardness of fate, from the unkindness of her family, from the house that was desecrated, from the existence which was not made sweet by any love—he was coming to deliver her. The air was all excitement, all agitation, to Lottie. It was not so much that she was glad—happiness was in it, and trouble, and regret, and agitation, made up by all these together. It was life in its strongest strain, tingling, throbbing, at the highest pressure. The earth was elastic under her feet, the whole world was full of this which was about to happen; and how she sang! Those lessons of hers were as a drama to the Signor, but he did not understand this art. He had understood the struggle she made to get hold of her powers on the day when Rollo was not there, and Lottie had made a proud, forlorn attempt to devote herself to

Song, as Song; he had understood the confusion and bewildered discouragement of the day when Mrs. Daventry assisted at the lesson; but this time the Signor was puzzled. There was nothing to excite her, only Mrs. O'Shaughnessy and Captain Temple, listeners who cared nothing for art, but only for Lottie; yet how she sang! He made her a little solemn compliment, almost for the first time.

"Miss Despard," he said, "you change from lesson to lesson—it is always another voice I hear; but this is the one I should like to retain; this is the one that shows what wonderful progress we have made."

Lottie smiled in a way which nearly won the Signor's steady heart. A golden dazzlement of light got into her eyes, as if the slanting afternoon sun was in them. She did not speak, but she gave him her hand—a thing which was very rare with Lottie. The Signor was flattered and touched; but he would not have been so flattered had he known that she was saying to herself, "It is the last time—it is the last!"

Mr. Ashford met the party coming out, and walked with them along the north side of the Abbey and through the cloisters. He could not make out why Lottie said nothing to him about her brother. To tell the truth, he wanted to have something for his money, and it did not seem that he was likely to get anything.

He said to her at last, abruptly, "I hope you think Law is likely to do well, Miss Despard?"

"Law?" she said, looking up with wondering eyes.

He was so confounded by her look of bewilderment that he did not say anything more.

Next day dawned bright and fair, as it ought. A fair, clear, sunny winter's day—not a leaf, even of those few that hung upon the ends of the boughs, stirring—not a cloud. Earth in such a day seems hanging suspended in the bright sphere, not certain yet whether she will turn back again to the careless summer, or go through her winter spell of storm duty. Lottie had all her preparations made; her dress ready to put on in the morning; her little bonnet done up in a parcel incredibly small, a veil looped about it; and the great cloak, a homely waterproof, which was to cover her from head to foot, and conceal her finery, hung out all ready. Everything ready—nothing now to be done but to meet him on the Slopes, and to hear how all had been settled, and arrange for the final meeting on the wedding morning. Even her railway fare, so many shillings, was put ready. She would not let him pay even that for her until she belonged to him. She went out with the dreamy sweetness of the approaching climax in her eyes when the last rays of the sunset were catching all the Abbey pinnacles. She scarcely saw the path over which her light feet skimmed.

The people who passed her glided like the people in a dream; the absorbing sweet agitation of happiness and fear, and hope and content, was in all her veins; her eyes were suffused with light as eyes get suffused with tears—an indescribable elation and alarm, sweet panic, yet calm, was in her breast. Mr. Ashford met her going along, swift and light, and with that air of abstraction from everything around her. She did not see him, nor anyone; but she remembered after, that she *had* seen him, and the very turn of the road where he made a half pause to speak to her, which she had not taken any notice of. In this soft rapture Lottie went to the corner of the bench under the elm-tree. It was too early, but she placed herself there to wait till he should come to her. This was the place where he was certain to come. By-and-by she would hear his step, skimming too, almost as light and quick as her own—or hear him vaulting over the low wall from the Deanery—or perhaps, to attract less notice, coming up the winding way from the Slopes. Where she sat was within reach of all the three. It was a little chilly now that the sun had gone down, but Lottie did not feel it. She sat down with a smile of happy anticipation on her face, hearing the Abbey bells in the clear frosty air, and then the bursting forth of the organ and all the strains of the music. These filled up her thoughts for the time, and it was not till the larger

volume of sound of the voluntary put Lottie in mind of the length of time she had waited, that she woke up to think of the possibility that something might have detained her lover. It was strange that he should be so late. The light was waning, and the sounds about were eerie; the wind that had lain so still all day woke up, and wandered chilly among the bare shrubberies, tossing off the late leaves. She shivered a little with the cold and the waiting. Why did not he come? the hour of stillness was passing fast, the organ pealing, the light fading moment by moment. Why was not Rollo here?

At last there was a step. It was not light and quick like his step; but something might have happened to make it sound differently—something in the air, or something in him, some gravity of movement befitting the importance of the occasion. So anxiety beguiles itself, trying to believe what it wishes. The step came nearer, and Lottie roused herself, a little alarmed, wondering if anything (she could not tell what) could have happened to him—and looked round. A figure—a man coming her way—her heart jumped into her throat, then sank down, down, with a flutter of fright and pain. It was not Rollo—but what then? it might be only some chance passer-by, not having anything to do with her and him. Another moment, and she waited with an agonised hope that

he was passing along without taking any notice, and that he had indeed nothing at all to do with her. But the steady step came on—nearer, nearer. She raised her head, she opened her eyes that had been veiled in such sweet dreams, with a wideness of fear and horror. What could he have to do with her? What had he come to tell her? The man came up to her straight, without any hesitation. He said, "Are you Miss Despard, ma'am? I was sent to give you this from my lord."

My lord—who was my lord? She took it with a gasp of terror. It was not Rollo that was my lord. The man, a middle-aged, respectable servant, gave her a look of grave pity and went away. Lottie sat still for a moment with the letter in her hand, thinking with wild impatience that the sound of those heavy departing steps would prevent her from hearing Rollo's light ones when he came. My lord—who was my lord? Suddenly an idea seized upon her. The light was almost gone. She tore the letter open, and read it by the faint chill shining of the skies, though it was almost too dark to see.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE END OF THE DREAM.

CAPTAIN TEMPLE was an old soldier, whose habit it was to get up very early in the morning. He said afterwards that he had never got up so early as on that morning, feeling a certain pride in it, as showing the magical power of sympathy and tenderness. He woke before it was light. It had been raining in the night, and the morning was veiled with showers; when the light came at last, it was white and misty. He was ready to go out before anyone was stirring. Not a soul, not even the milkman, was astir in the Dean's Walk. The blinds were still down over his neighbours' windows. The only one drawn up, he noticed in passing, was Lottie's. Was she too early, like himself? the question went through his mind as he passed. Poor child! her life was not a happy one. How different, he could not help feeling, how different his own girl would have been had she but been spared them! He shook his white head, though he was alone, wailing, almost remonstrating, with Providence. How strange that the blessing should be with those who did not know how to prize it, while those

did were left desolate! The Captain's step rang through the silent place. There was no one about; the Abbey stood up grey and still with the morning mists softly breaking from about it, and here and there, behind and around, smoke rose from some homely roof, betraying the first signs of waking life. Captain Temple walked briskly to the Slopes; it was his favourite walk. He made one or two turns up and down all the length of the level promenade, thinking about her—how often she had come with him here: but lately she had avoided him. He paused when he had made two or three turns, and leaned over the low parapet wall, looking down upon the misty landscape. The river ran swiftly at the foot of the hill, showing in a pale gleam here and there. The bare branches of the trees were all jewelled coldly with drops of rain. It began to drizzle again as he stood gazing over the misty wet champaign in the stillness of the early morning. He was the only conscious tenant of this wide world of earth and sky. Smoke rising from the houses in the town, and a faint stir was beginning; but here on the hill there was no stir or waking movement, save only his own.

What was that? a sound—he turned round quickly —he could not tell what it was; was there someone about after all, someone else as early as himself? But he could see nobody. There was not a step nor a visible movement, but there was a sense of a human

presence, a feeling of somebody near him. He turned round with an anxiety which he could not explain to himself. Why should he be anxious? but it pleased him afterwards to remember that all his sensations this morning were strange, uncalled for, beyond his own control. He peered anxiously about among the bushes and bare stems of the trees. At last it seemed to him that he saw something in the corner of the bench under the elm-tree. He turned that way, now with his old heart beating, but altogether unprepared for the piteous sight that met his eyes. She was so slim, so slight, her dress so heavy and clinging with the rain, that a careless passer-by might never have seen her. He hurried to the place with a little cry. Her head drooped upon the rough wooden back of the seat, her hands were wrapped in her cloak, nothing visible of her but a face as white as death, and wet—was it with rain or with tears? Her eyes were closed, her long dark eyelashes drooping over her cheek. But for her frightful paleness she would have looked like a child who had lost its way, and cried itself to sleep. "Lottie!" cried the old man; "Lottie!" But she made response. She did not even open her eyes. Was she sleeping, or, good God——! He put his hand on her shoulder. "Lottie, Lottie, my dear child!" he cried into her ear. When after a while a deep sigh came from her breast, the old man could have wept for joy. She was living then. He thought for

ment what was to be done; some help seemed indispensable to him; then rushed away down through the cloisters to the house of Mr. Ashford, which was one of the nearest. The Minor Canon was coming downstairs; he had something to do which called him out early. He paused in some surprise at the sight of his visitor, but Captain Temple stopped the question on his lips. "Will you come with me?" he cried; "come with me—I want you," and caught him by the sleeve in his eagerness. Mr. Ashford felt that there was that in the old man's haggard face which would not bear questioning. He followed him, scarcely able in the fulness of his strength to keep up with the nervous steps of his guide. "God knows if she has been there all night," the Captain said. "I cannot get her to move. And now the whole place will be astir. If I could get her home before anybody knows! They have driven her out of her sweet senses," he said, gasping for breath as he hurried along. "I came for you because you are her friend, and I could trust you. Oh, why is a jewel like that given to those who do not prize it, Mr. Ashford, and taken from those that do? Why is it? why is it? they have broken her heart." The Minor Canon asked no questions; he felt that he too knew by instinct what it was. The rain had come on more heavily, small and soft, without any appearance of storm, but penetrating and continuous. The Captain hurried on to the corner where he had

left her. Lottie had moved her head; she had been roused by his first appeal from the stupor into which she had fallen; her eyes were open, her mind slowly coming, if not to itself, at least to some consciousness of the external world and her place in it. The instinct that so seldom abandons a woman, that of concealing her misery, had begun to dawn in her—the first sign of returning life.

"Lottie, Lottie, my dear child, you must not sit here in the rain. Come, my pet, come. We have come to fetch you. Come to your mother, or at least to one who will be like a mother. Come, my poor dear, come home with me." The old man was almost sobbing as he took into his her cold hands.

Lottie did her best to respond. She attempted to smile, she attempted to speak mechanically. "Yes," she said, under her breath; "I will come—directly. It is—raining." Her voice was almost gone; it was all they could do to make out what she said.

"And here is a kind friend who will give you his arm, who will help you along," said Captain Temple. He stopped short—frightened by the change that came over her face; an awful look of hope, of wonder, woe in her eyes, which looked preternaturally large, luminous and drowsy. She stirred in her seat, moving with a little moan of pain, and attempted to turn round to look behind her.

"Who is it?" she whispered. "Who is it? is it—you?"

Who did she expect it to be? Mr. Ashford, greatly moved, stepped forward quickly and raised her from her seat. It was no time for politeness. He drew her arm within his, not looking at her. "Support her," he said quickly to Captain Temple, "on the other side." The Minor Canon never looked at Lottie as he half carried her along that familiar way. He did not dare to spy into her secret, but he guessed at it. The hand which he drew through his arm held a letter. He knew none of the steps which had led to this, but he thought he knew what had happened. As for Captain Temple, he did not do much of his share of the work; he held her elbow with his trembling hand, and looked pitifully into her face, knowing nothing at all. "My poor dear," he said, "you shall not go back—you shall not be made miserable; you are mine now. I have found you, and I shall keep you, Lottie. It is not like a stepmother that my Mary will be. My love, we will say nothing about it, we will not blame anyone; but now you belong to me." What he said was as the babbling of a child to Lottie, and to the other who divined her; but they let him talk, and the old man seemed to himself to understand the position entirely. "They have driven her out of her senses," he said to his wife; "so far as I can see she has been out on the Slopes all *night, sitting* on that bench. She will be ill,

she is sure to be ill—she is drenched to the skin. Think if it had been our own girl! But I will never let her go into the hands of those wretches again."

No one of the principal actors in this strange incident ever told the story, yet it was known all through the Abbey precincts in a few hours—with additions—that Captain Despard's new wife had driven her step-daughter out of the house by her ill-usage; turned her to the door, some said; and that the poor girl, distracted and solitary, had spent the night on the Slopes, in the cold, in the rain, and had been found there by Captain Temple. "When we were all in our comfortable beds," the good people cried with angry tears, and an indignation beyond words. Captain Despard came in from matins in a state of alarm indescribable, and besought his wife to keep indoors, not to allow herself to be seen. No one in the house had known of Lottie's absence during the night. She was supposed to be "sulky," as Polly called it, and shut up in her own room. When she did not appear at breakfast, indeed, there had been some surprise, and a slight consternation, but even then no very lively alarm. "She's gone off, as she said she would," Polly said, tossing her head; and the Captain had, though with some remorse and compunction, satisfied himself that it was only an escapade on Lottie's part, which would be explained by the post, or which Law would know about, or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. Law had gone out

early, before breakfast. It was natural to suppose he would know—or still more likely that his sister had gone with him, on some foolish walk, or other expedition. "I don't mean to hurt your feelings," Polly cried, "but I shouldn't break my heart, Harry, if they'd gone for good, and left us the house to ourselves." When Captain Despard came in from matins, however, the case was very different; he came in pale with shame and consternation, and ready to blame his wife for everything. "This is what has come of your nagging and your impudence," he said; and Polly flew to arms, as was natural, and there was a hot and dangerous encounter. The Captain went out, swearing and fuming, recommending her if she prized her own safety not to show herself out of doors. "You will be mobbed," he said; "and you will well deserve it."

"I'm going to put my hat on," said Polly, "and let them all see what a coward you are, as won't stand up for your wife." But when he had slammed the door emphatically after him, Polly sat down and had a good cry, and did not put on her hat. Oh, what a foolish thing it is, she repeated, to marry a man with grown-up children! It was nature, and not anything she had done, that was in fault.

Lottie made no resistance when she found herself in Mrs. Temple's care. To have her wet things taken off, to have a hundred cares lavished upon her, as she lay aching and miserable in the bed that had

been prepared for her, soothed her at least, if they did nothing more. Chilled in every bit of her body, chilled to her heart, the sensation of warmth, when at last it stole over her, broke a little the stony front of her wretchedness. She never knew how she had passed that miserable night. The fabric of her happiness had fallen down on every side, and crushed her. Her heart had been so confident, her hopes so certain. She had not doubted, as women so often do, or even thought it within the compass of possibility that Rollo could fail her. How could she suppose it? and, when it came, she was crushed to the ground. The earth seemed to have opened under her feet; everything failed her when that one thing in which all her faith was placed failed. She had sat through the darkness, not able to think, conscious of nothing but misery, not aware how the time was passing, taking no note of the coming of the night, or of the bewildering chimes from the Abbey of hour after hour and quarter after quarter. Quarter or hour, what did it matter to her? what did she know of the hurrying, flying time, or its stupefying measures? It began to rain, and she did not care. She cared for nothing—not the cold, nor the dark, nor the whispering of the night wind among the bare branches, the mysterious noises of the night. The pillars of the earth, the arch of the sweet sky, had fallen. There was nothing in all the world but dismal failure and heart-break to

Lottie. In the long vigil, even the cause of this horrible downfall seemed to fade out of her mind. The pain in her heart, the oppression of her brain, the failing of all things—hope, courage, faith—was all she was conscious of. Rollo—her thoughts avoided his name, as a man who is wounded shrinks from any touch; and at last everything had fallen into one stupor of misery. That it was the night which she was spending there, under the dark sky, just light enough to show the darker branches waving over it, the rain falling from it, Lottie was unconscious. She had nowhere to go, she had no wish to go anywhere; shelter was indifferent to her, and one place no more miserable than another. When Captain Temple roused her, there came vaguely to her mind a sense that her feelings must be hid, that she must try to be as other people, not betraying her own desolation; and this was the feeling that again woke feebly in her when Mrs. Temple took her place by the bedside where Lottie was lying. She tried to make some feeble excuse, an excuse which in the desperation of her mind did not sound so artificial as it was. "I give you a great deal of trouble," she faltered.

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Temple, with tears, "do not say so; let me do what I can for you—only trust in me, trust in me."

Lottie could not trust in anyone. She tried to smile. She was past all confidences, past all revela-

that she was more tender than even the Father of all. "Thou hast taken mine from me, but I have not closed my heart to thine," was what, all unawares, the woman's heart said; for she was angry still, being a mother, and unable to see why she should have been bereaved.

A few days after Lottie had begun to be brought downstairs (for this was done without any will of hers), a visit was paid to her which had no small effect upon her life. She was seated in the invalid's place near the fire, a little table by her side with flowers on it, and a new book, and *Punch*, and the illustrated papers, all the little innocent *gâteries* of which the old Captain could think, the trifles which make the days of a happy convalescent sweet, and which Lottie tried hard to look as if she cared for; and with Mrs. Temple near her, watching her to see lest she should be too warm or too cold, lest she should want anything, with the anxious care of a mother. There was a prancing of horses outside the door, a tremendous knock, a rustle of silk, and wafting of perfume, and the door was opened and Mrs. Daventry announced. Augusta came in with a sweep which filled Mrs. Temple's little drawing-room. There did not seem room for its legitimate inmates in that redundant presence. Mrs. Temple ran to her patient, thinking Lottie was about to faint, but she recovered herself enough to smile faintly at Augusta when she spoke,

which was as much as she did to anyone. Augusta seated herself opposite the convalescent, her train falling round her in heavy masses—the one all wealth and commotion and importance, the other so pale, so slight in her weakness, her brown merino dress hanging loosely upon her. Mrs. Temple was not made much account of by the fine lady, who made her a slight salutation, half bow, half curtsey, and took no further notice of "the people of the house."

"Well," she said, "how are you, and what has been the matter? There are the most extraordinary stories told about you. I have come to find out what is really the matter, Lottie. Mamma wishes to know too. You know you were always a kind of favourite with mamma."

"I will tell you about her illness," said Mrs. Temple. "She is scarcely well enough yet to enter into details."

"Oh," said Augusta, gazing blankly upon the "person of the house,"—then she returned to Lottie again. "I don't want you to enter into details; but they say the most extraordinary things; they say you were turned out of doors, and stayed all night on the Slopes—that, of course, can't be true—but I wish you would tell me what is true, that I may give the right version of the story. Mamma is quite anxious to *know.*"

that she was more tender than even the Father of all. "Thou hast taken mine from me, but I have not closed my heart to thine," was what, all unawares, the woman's heart said; for she was angry still, being a mother, and unable to see why she should have been bereaved.

A few days after Lottie had begun to be brought downstairs (for this was done without any will of hers), a visit was paid to her which had no small effect upon her life. She was seated in the invalid's place near the fire, a little table by her side with flowers on it, and a new book, and *Punch*, and the illustrated papers, all the little innocent *gâteries* of which the old Captain could think, the trifles which make the days of a happy convalescent sweet, and which Lottie tried hard to look as if she cared for; and with Mrs. Temple near her, watching her to see lest she should be too warm or too cold, lest she should want anything, with the anxious care of a mother. There was a prancing of horses outside the door, a tremendous knock, a rustle of silk, and wafting of perfume, and the door was opened and Mrs. Daventry announced. Augusta came in with a sweep which filled Mrs. Temple's little drawing-room. There did not seem room for its legitimate inmates in that redundant presence. Mrs. Temple ran to her patient, thinking Lottie was about to faint, but she recovered herself enough to smile faintly at Augusta when she spoke,

which was as much as she did to anyone. Augusta seated herself opposite the convalescent, her train falling round her in heavy masses—the one all wealth and commotion and importance, the other so pale, so slight in her weakness, her brown merino dress hanging loosely upon her. Mrs. Temple was not made much account of by the fine lady, who made her a slight salutation, half bow, half curtsey, and took no further notice of "the people of the house."

"Well," she said, "how are you, and what has been the matter? There are the most extraordinary stories told about you. I have come to find out what is really the matter, Lottie. Mamma wishes to know too. You know you were always a kind of favourite with mamma."

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"Lottie, my dear, I will tell Mrs. Daventry," said Mrs. Temple, "it is too much for you;" and she held her point and recounted her little story with a primness which suited her voice and manner. Many were the demonstrations of impatience which the fine lady made, but it was not in her power to struggle against Mrs. Temple's determination. She turned to Lottie again as soon as the tale was told.

"Is that true? Only a very bad cold, and influenza from getting wet? Oh, we heard a great deal more than that; and your voice—we heard you had quite lost your voice. I promised the Signor to inquire. He is quite anxious, he always thought so much of your voice. He is an odd man," said Augusta, giving a blow in passing, "he thinks so differently from other people about many things. I promised to find out for him all about it. Have you really, really lost your voice, as everybody says?"

It was curious that Lottie, who had never been concerned about her voice, who had never cared anything about it, who had not wanted to be a singer at all, should feel, even in the midst of the greater and deeper unhappiness that possessed her, a distinct sting of pain as she heard this question. Her paleness was flushed with a sudden painful colour. She looked at Mrs. Temple wistfully again.

"You can hear that she is hoarse," said Mrs. Temple; "a very common consequence of a cold. She

has lost her voice for the moment, but we hope to find it again."

"I think she must be dumb altogether, as she never answers me," said Augusta, fretfully. Then she tried another subject, with a triumphant certainty of success. "I don't know if you have heard of our trouble," she said, looking at her black dress. "You remember, Lottie, my cousin, Mr. Ridsdale? Oh, yes; you knew him a little, I think."

Once more Lottie's pale face flushed with painful overwhelming colour. She looked up with alarmed and troubled eyes.

"Oh, I see you remember him; he was such a flirt, he was always making himself agreeable to women. It did not matter who they were," said Augusta, fixing her eyes on her victim's face, "or what class of people, so long as they were at all nice-looking, or could sing, or draw, or anything. I remember I sent him out to try whether he could not hear you sing the very day I was married. He was another of the people who believed in you, Lottie. He did not hear you then, so he made mamma ask you, you remember. He had something to do with a new opera company, and he was always on the look-out for a new voice."

Once more Lottie turned her eyes upon Mrs. Temple, eyes full of anguish and wonder. Who else could she turn to?—not to the cruel executioner who sat opposite to her, with a lurking smile about her heartless mouth.

How cruel a woman can be with a fair face, and no signs of the savage in her! Augusta saw that her arrow had struck home, and was encouraged to do more.

"Oh, yes; he was in a great state about your voice. He said it would make his fortune and yours too. He was always ridiculously sanguine. You know how he used to flatter you, Lottie, and go to all your lessons. Oh, you must not tell me that you don't remember, for I could see you liked it. Well," said Augusta, who did not lose a single change of colour, no quiver of her victim's lips, or flutter of her bosom, "that sort of thing is all over now. Oh, I daresay he will continue to take a great interest as an amateur; but his position is now entirely changed. My poor cousin Ridsdale, Rollo's eldest brother, was killed in the hunting-field about a fortnight ago. Such a shock for us all! but it has made a great change for Rollo. He is Lord Ridsdale now, and my uncle Courtland's heir. His servant came last Friday week to fetch some things he had left at the Deanery—for he had gone away for the day only, not knowing what had happened. Poor fellow; and yet, of course, though he was truly grieved and all that, it is great good fortune for him. We are not likely *now*," Augusta added, with a faint sigh, "to see much of him here."

Lottie did not say a word. She sat, no longer changing colour, perfectly pale, with the great

eyes that had so expanded and dilated during her illness, fixed upon the vacant air. To hear him named was still something, and filled her with a sick excitement, an anguish of interest and agitation. After the long silence, after the cutting of all ties, after his cruel desertion of her, after the blow which had all but killed her, to hear of him had been something. Pain —yet a pain she was more eager to undergo than to meet any pleasure. But Lottie had not calculated upon the cruel, treacherous, yet careless, blow which fell upon her now, upon her quivering wounds. To hear her voice, was that what it was? not to see her because he loved her, but to hear her singing. Till now she had at least had her past. He was false, and had forsaken her, she knew, but once he had loved her; the Rollo who gazed up in the moonlight at her window had still been hers, though another Rollo had betrayed her trust and broken her heart. But now! the blood ebbed away from her face, and seemed to fail from her heart; the beating of it grew confused and muffled in her ears. She gazed with her great eyes, all strained and pained with gazing, at nothing. To hear her sing, not seeking her, but only running after a new voice! She sat with her hands clasped upon her lap in a kind of piteous appeal, and sometimes would look at the one and then the other, asking them—was it true, could it be true?

"I must *go*," said Augusta, having fired her shot,

"and I am glad to have such a good account of you. Only a bad cold and a hoarseness, such as are quite common. Mamma will be pleased to hear, and so will the Signor. I can't tell him anything about your voice, because you have not let me hear it, Lottie. Oh, quite prudent—much the best thing not to use it at all; though with an old friend, to be sure—you look rather ill, I am bound to say."

Lottie sat still in the same attitude after this cruel visitor was gone, all her thoughts going back upon that time, which after all was only a few months, yet which seemed her life. She had given him up, or rather she had accepted his abandonment of her, without a struggle, without a hope; it had been to her as a doom out of Heaven. She had not even blamed him. It had killed her, she thought. She had not resisted, but it had killed her. Now, however, she could not submit. In her heart she fought wildly against this last, most cruel blow. He was not her: he was cut off from her, by his own murderous hanc but to give up the lover who had loved her before l knew her, who had watched under her window a wiled her heart away, that she could not do. S fought against it passionately in her soul. The af noon went on without a sound, nothing but the a: softly falling from the fire, the soft movement of Temple's arm as she worked; but the silence tir all the time with the echo of Augusta's words

with the hot conflict of recollections in her own heart, opposing and denying them. Mrs. Temple worked quietly by and watched, divining something of the struggle, though she did not know what it was. At last, all at once in the stillness, the girl broke forth passionately: "Oh, no, no," she cried, "not that! I will not believe it. Not that; it is not true."

"What is not true, dear? tell me," her companion said, laying down her work, and coming forward with tender hands outstretched, and pity in her eyes.

"You heard her," Lottie said, "you heard her. That it was to hear me singing—that it was all for my voice. No, no, not that! It could not be—*that* was not true. You could not believe *that* was true."

And Lottie looked at her piteously, clasping her hands, entreating her with those pathetic eyes for a little comfort. "Not that, not that," she said. "My singing, was it likely? Oh you cannot think *that!*" she cried.

Mrs. Temple did all she could to soothe her. "My poor child, it is all over—over and ended—what does it matter now?"

"It matters all the world to me," Lottie cried. Kind as her new guardian was, she could not understand that even when her happiness and her hopes were all crushed, it was a bitterness more exquisite, a sting the girl could not bear to believe that her foundations *had been sand*, that she had been deluded from

the beginning, that the love she trusted in had never been. This sting was so keen and sharp that it woke her from the apathy of despair that was creeping over her. She was roused to struggle, to a passion of resistance and denial. "How can anyone but I know how it was? It all came from that; without that I should never have thought—we should never have met. It was the beginning. How can anyone know but me?" she cried, contending as against some adversary. When the first strain of this conflict was over, she turned, faltering, to her kind guardian. "I had a letter," she said; "it was *the* letter. I cannot find it." She gave her a look of entreaty which went to Mrs. Temple's heart.

"I have got your letter, Lottie. I have it in my desk, put away. No one has seen it. Let me put it into the fire."

"Ah, no! perhaps there may be something in it different from what I thought."

She held out her hands supplicating, and Mrs. Temple went to her desk and took out an envelope. Within was something all stained and blurred. The rain had half washed the cruel words away. Once for all, as Rollo's last act and deed, and suicidal exit from this history, the letter shall be copied here. Imagine how Lottie had been sitting, all happiness and soft agitation and excitement, waiting for him when this curt epistle came:—

"DEAR LOTTIE,—

"An extraordinary change has happened in my life—not my doing, but that of Providence. It gives me new duties, and a new existence altogether. What we have been thinking of cannot be. It is impossible in every way. For me to do what I promised to you was, when we parted, a sacrifice which I was willing to make, but now is an impossibility. I am afraid you will feel this very much—and don't think I don't feel it; but it is an impossibility. I have things to do and a life to lead that makes it impossible. I hope soon someone will be raised up for you when you want it most, to give you the help and assistance I would so gladly have given. Could I but know that you assented to this, that you saw the reason for my conduct, I should be as happy as I now can ever be; and I hope that you will do so when you can look at it calmly. Farewell, dear Lottie, think of me with as little anger as you can, for it is not I, but Providence. Your voice will soon make you independent; it is only a momentary disappointment, I know, and I cannot help it. To do what we settled to do is now an impossibility—an impossibility. Dear Lottie, farewell!

"R. R."

Underneath, *Forgive me* was scrawled hastily, as if by an afterthought.

In the calm warm room, in the dull afternoon,

under the eyes of her tender nurse, Lottie read over again this letter, which she had read with incredulous wonder, with stupefying misery, by the dim light of the evening under the black waving branches of the leafless trees. She gave a cry of anguish, of horror, of indignation and shame, and with trembling hands folded it up, and put it within its cover, and thrust it back into Mrs. Temple's keeping. "Oh, take it, take it," she cried wildly; "keep it, it has killed me. Perhaps—perhaps! the other is true too."

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### APRÈS?

LAW had been living a busy life at the time of this crisis and climax of his sister's existence. He had spent day after day in London, lost in that dangerous and unaccustomed delight of spending money, which is only tasted in its full flavour by those who are little accustomed to have any money to spend. Law was tempted by a hundred things which would have been no temptation at all to more experienced travellers—miracles of convenience and cheapness, calculated to smooth the path of the emigrant, but which were apt, on being bought, to turn out both worthless and expensive—and many a day the young fellow came home penitent and troubled, though he started every morning with an ever-renewed confidence in his own wisdom. Lottie's sudden illness had checked these preparations in mid-career. He had lost the ship in which he meant to have made his voyage, and though he bore the delay with Christian resignation, it was hard to keep from thinking sometimes that Lottie could not have chosen a worse moment for being ill—a little later, or a little earlier, neither would have mattered

half so much—but at the very moment when he was about to sail! However, he allowed impartially that it was not his sister's fault, and did not deny her his sympathy. Law, however, had never been satisfied about the cause of her illness. He did not know why she should have sat out on the Slopes all night. Polly —he refused the idea that it was Polly. Mrs. Despard was bad enough, but not so bad as that; nor did Lottie care enough for the intruder to allow herself to be driven out in this way. But Law kept this conviction to himself, and outwardly accepted the story, not even asking any explanation from his sister. Whatever was the real reason, it was no doubt the same cause which kept her from listening to him when he had tried to tell her of the new step in his own career, and the unexpected liberality of the Minor Canon. "If it had but been he!" Law said to himself—for indeed he, who knew the value of money, never entertained any doubt as to Mr. Ashford's meaning in befriending him; he was a great deal more clear about this than Mr. Ashford himself.

He lost his passage by the ship with which he had originally intended to go. It was a great disappointment, but what could he do? He could not start off for the Antipodes when his sister might be dying. And as for his own affairs, they had not come to any satisfactory settlement. Instead of saying yes or no to his question to her, Emma, when he had seen her, had

done everything a girl could do to make him change his intention. To make *him* change his intention!—the very idea of this filled him with fierce scorn. It was quite simple that she should make up her mind to leave everything she cared for, for love of him; but that he should change his purpose for love of her, was an idea so absurd that Law laughed at the simplicity of it. As well expect the Abbey tower to turn round with the wind as the weathercock did; but yet Law did not object to stroll down to the River Lane in the evenings, when he had nothing else to do, sometimes finding admission to the workroom when the mother was out of the way, demanding to know what was Emma's decision, and smiling at her entreaties. *She* cried, clasping her hands with much natural eloquence, while she tried to persuade him; but Law laughed.

"Are you coming with me?" he said—he gave no answer to the other suggestion—and by this time he had fully made up his mind that she did not mean to come, and was not very sorry. He had done his duty by her—he had not been false, nor separated himself from old friends when prosperity came; no one could say that of him. But still he was not sorry to make his start alone—to go out to the new world unencumbered. Nevertheless, though they both knew this was how it would end, it still amused Law in his unoccupied evenings to do his little love-making at the corner of the River Lane, by the light of the dull

lamp, and it pleased Emma to be made love to. They availed themselves of this diversion of the moment, though it often led to trouble, and sometimes to tears; and Emma for her part suffered many scoldings in consequence. The game, it is to be supposed, was worth the candle, though it was nothing but a game after all.

On the day after Mrs. Daventry's visit, Lottie sent for her brother. He found her no longer a languid invalid, but with a fire of fervid energy in her eyes.

"Law," she said, "I want you to tell me what you are going to do. You told me once, and I did not pay any attention—I had other—other things in my mind. Tell me now, Law."

Then he told her all that had happened, and all he had been doing. "It was your sense, Lottie, after all," he said. "You were always the one that had the sense. Who would have thought when I went to old Ashford to be coached, that he would come forward like this, and set me up for life? Nor he wouldn't have done that much either," Law added, with a laugh, "but for you!"

"Law," cried Lottie, with that fire in her eyes, "this was what we wanted all the time, though we did not know it. It was always an office I was thinking of—and that I would be your housekeeper—your servant if we were too poor to keep a servant; but

done everything a girl could do to make him change his intention. To make *him* change his intention!—the very idea of this filled him with fierce scorn. It was quite simple that she should make up her mind to leave everything she cared for, for love of him; but that he should change his purpose for love of her, was an idea so absurd that Law laughed at the simplicity of it. As well expect the Abbey tower to turn round with the wind as the weathercock did; but yet Law did not object to stroll down to the River Lane in the evenings, when he had nothing else to do, sometimes finding admission to the workroom when the mother was out of the way, demanding to know what was Emma's decision, and smiling at her entreaties. *She* cried, clasping her hands with much natural eloquence, while she tried to persuade him; but Law laughed.

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and oh, Law, you don't know——. To walk about here again—to live, where one has almost died—to see the same things—the place—where it all happened——"

Lottie was stopped by the gasp of weeping that came into her throat. She ended with a low cry of passionate pain. "I must go somewhere. I cannot stay here. We will go together, and work together; and some time, perhaps—some time—we shall not be unhappy, Law."

"I am not unhappy now," said the young man. "I don't know why you should be so dismal. Many a fellow would give his ears to be in my place. But you—that's quite a different thing. A man can go to many a place where he can't drag his sister after him. Besides, you've got no outfit," cried Law, delighted to find so simple a reason, "and no money to get one. Old Ashford has been awfully kind; but I don't think it would be nice to draw him for an outfit for you. It wouldn't be kind," said Law, with a grin, "it would be like the engineer fellow in Shakespeare—burst with his own boiler. You know that would never do."

"A woman does not need an outfit, as a man does," said Lottie; "a woman can put up with anything. If you go away, what is to become of me? When you are young, whatever you may have had to make you unhappy, you cannot die when you please. That would

be the easiest way of all—but it is not possible; you cannot die when you please."

"Die—who wants to die?" said Law. "Don't you know it's wicked to talk so. Why, there's your singing. You'll be able to make a great deal more money than I ever shall; and of course you may come over starring to Australia when you're a great singer; but it would be ruin to you now to go there. Don't be carried away by it because I'm lucky just now, because it's my turn," he said; "everybody wants to hold on by a fellow when he's in luck—but it is really you who are the lucky one of the family."

"My voice is gone," said Lottie, "my home is gone. I have nothing in the world but you. All I used to have a little hope in is over. There are only two of us in the world, brother and sister. What can I do but go with you? I have nobody but you."

"Oh, that's bosh," said Law, getting up from his seat in impatience. "I don't believe a word they say about your voice. You'll see it'll soon come back if you give it a chance; and as for having nobody but me, I never knew a girl that had so many friends—there's these old Temples, and heaps of people; and it seems to me you may marry whoever you like all round. A girl has no right to turn up her nose at that. Besides, what made old Ashford so kind to me? You don't find men doing that sort of thing for nothing in this world. I always think it's kindest to

speak out plain," said Law, reddening, however, with a sense of cruelty, "not to take you in with pretending. Look here, Lottie. I can't take you with me. I have got no more than I shall want for myself, and I may have to knock about a great deal there before I get anything. And to tell the truth," said Law, reddening still more, "if I was to take a woman with me, it would be more natural to take—someone else. A fellow expects to marry, to make himself comfortable when he gets out there. Now you can't do that if you have a sister always dragging after you. I've told you this before, Lottie—you know I have. I don't want to hurt your feelings when you've been ill—but what can a fellow do? To say what you mean once for all, that is the best for both you and me."

Law made his exit abruptly when he had given forth this confession. He could say what was necessary boldly enough, but he did not like to face his sister's disappointment. It was a comfort to him to meet Mr. Ashford at the door.

"Lottie is upstairs," he said. "She wants me to take her with me, but I have told her I can't take her with me. I wish you would say a word to her."

Law rushed away with a secret chuckle when he had sent to his sister a new suitor to console her. If one lover proves unsatisfactory, what can be better than to replace him by another? Law felt himself bound in gratitude and honour to do all that

could for Mr. Ashford, who had been so kind to him; and was it not evidently the best thing—far the best thing for Lottie too?

The Minor Canon went upstairs with a little quickening of his pulse. He had been a great deal about Captain Temple's little house since the morning when he had brought Lottie there, and her name and the thought of her had been in his mind constantly. He had not defended himself against this preoccupation, for would it not have been churlish to put the poor girl out of his mind when she was so desolate, and had no other place belonging to her? Rather he had thrown open all his doors and taken in her poor pale image, and made a throne for her, deserted, helpless, abandoned as she was. A generous soul cannot take care of itself when a friend is in trouble. Mr. Ashford, who had been on the edge of the precipice, half consciously, for some time, holding himself back as he could, thinking as little about her as he could, now let himself go. He felt as the Quixotes of humanity are apt to feel, that nothing he could give her should be withheld now. If it did not do her any good, still it would be something—it was all he could do. He let himself go. He thought of her morning and night, cherishing her name in his heart. Poor Lottie—life and love had alike been traitors to her. "Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I," he said, as once was said rashly to a greater than man. What could

he ever be to her, wrung as her heart was by another? but that did not matter. If it was any compensation to her, she should have his heart to do what she liked with. This was the sentiment in the mind of the Minor Canon, who ought, you will say, to have known better, but who never had been practical, as the reader knows. He went upstairs with his heart beating. How gladly he would have said a hundred words to her, and offered her all he had, to make up for the loss of that which she could not have. But what his generosity would have thrown at her feet, his delicacy forbade him to offer. Lottie, in her disappointment and desertion (which he only divined, yet was certain of) was sacred to him. Mrs. Temple was absent about her household concerns, and there was nobody in the drawing-room upstairs except Lottie, who in her excitement and despair did not hear his step, nor think that anyone might be coming. She was walking about the room, with her hands clasped and strained against her breast, her weak steps full of feverish energy, her eyes glowing with a fire of despair. "What shall I do? what shall I do?" she was moaning in the anguish of her heart.

When Ernest Ashford opened the door, her back was turned to him, so that he heard this moan, and saw the passionate misery of her struggle, before she knew that he was there. When she saw him a momentary gleam of anger came over her face; then she put

force upon herself, and dropped her hands by her side like a culprit, and tried to receive him as she ought. As she ought—for was not he her brother's benefactor, whom all this time she had been neglecting, not thanking him as he had a right to be thanked? The change from that anguish and despair which she had been indulging when alone, to the sudden softening of courtesy and compunction and gratitude which, after a pathetic momentary interval of struggling with herself, came over her face, was one of those sudden variations which had transported Rollo in the beginning of their acquaintance by its power of expression. But this change, which would have pleased the other, went to the heart of the Minor Canon, to whom Lottie had never appeared in the light of an actress or singer, but only as herself.

"Mr. Ashford," she said faintly. "I wanted to see you—to thank you——"

She was trembling, and he came up to her tenderly —but with a tenderness that never betrayed its own character—grave and calm, for all that his heart was beating—and took her hand and arm into his, and led her to her chair. "You must not thank me for anything," he said.

"For Law——"

"No; not for Law. If it would give you any ease or any comfort, you should have everything I have. That *is not saying* much. You should have all I

can do or think," he said, with a thrill in his voice, which was all that betrayed his emotion. "The misery of human things is that all I can do is not what you want, Lottie—and that what you want is out of my power."

He asked no permission to call her by her name; he was not aware he did it—nor was she.

"I want nothing," she said, with a passionate cry. "Oh, do not think I am so miserable and weak. I want nothing. Only, if Law could take me with him —take me away—to a new place—to a new life."

He sat down beside her, and softly pressed the hand which he held in his own. Yes, this was the misery of human things, as he said—he did not repeat the words, but they were in his face. That which she wanted was not for her, nor was his desire for him; other gifts might be thrown at their feet, and lie there unheeded, but not that for which they pined and were ready to die.

"Do you think it must not be?" she said. Lottie was willing to make him the judge of her fate—to allow him to decide for her how it was to be. Yes, but only in that way in which he was powerless. He smiled, with a sense of this irony, which is more tragic than any solemn verdict of fate.

"I do not think it could be," he said, "except with perfect consent and harmony; and Law—does not wish it. He is like the rest of us. He does not care for

what he can have, though another man might give his life for it. It is the way of the world."

"I am used to it," said Lottie, bowing her head; "you need not say it is the way of the world to break it to me, Mr. Ashford. Oh, how well I ought to know! I am used to being rejected. Papa, and Law, and——"

She put her hand over her hot eyes, but she did not mean to drop into self-pity. "Nobody cares to have me," she said after a moment, with the quiver of a smile on her lips. "I must make up my mind to it —and when you are young you cannot die whenever you please. I must do something for myself."

"That is it," said the Minor Canon, bitterly—"always the same; between those you love and those that love you there is a great gulf; therefore you must do something for yourself."

She looked at him wondering, with sad eyes. He was angry, but not with her—with life and fate; and Lottie did not blush as she divined his secret. It was too serious for that. It was not her fault or his fault; neither of them had done it or could mend it. Had she but known! had he but known! Now there was nothing to be done but to unite what little wisdom they had over the emergency, and decide what she was to do—for herself. Her father had no place for her in his house. Law would not have her with him; her lover had forsaken her; and to those who would

have had her, who would have cherished her, there was no response in Lottie's heart. Yet here she stood with her problem of existence in her hands, to be solved somehow. She looked piteously at the man who loved her, but was her friend above all, silently asking that counsel of which she stood so much in need. What was she to do?

Just then the door opened, and Mrs. Temple came in with Dr. Enderby, who had been kind to Lottie, as they all were, and who regulated everybody's health within the Precincts, from Lady Caroline downward. The good doctor, who had daughters of his own, looked with kind eyes upon the girl, who was so much less happy than they. He took her slender wrist into his hand, and looked into her luminous, over-clear eyes, wet with involuntary tears.

"She is looking a great deal better. She will soon be quite herself," he said cheerfully; but winked his own eyelids to throw off something, which was involuntary too.

"Yes, yes," said Captain Temple, who had come in after him. "She will soon be quite herself; but you must give her her orders to stay with us, doctor. We want to be paid for nursing her—and now she will be able to run about on all our errands, and save us a great deal of trouble, and keep us happy with her pretty voice and her singing. Did you ever hear her sing, doctor? The Signor is very anxious about her.

We must begin our lessons again, my pretty Lottie, as soon as ever the doctor gives leave."

Dr. Enderby looked very grave. "There is no hurry about that," he said, "let her have a little more time. The Signor must be content to wait."

Now Lottie had said, and they all had said, that her voice was gone; but when the doctor's face grew so grave, a cold chill struck to their hearts. She gave him a startled look of alarmed inquiry, she who had suddenly realised, now that all dreams were over, that question of existence which is the primitive question in this world. Before happiness, before love, before everything that makes life lovely, this mere ignoble foundation of a living, must come. When one is young, as Lottie said, one cannot die at one's own pleasure—and suddenly, just as she had got to realise that necessity, was it possible that this other loss was really coming too? She looked at him with anxious eyes, but he would not look at her, to give her any satisfaction; then she laid her hand softly on his arm.

"Doctor," she said, "tell me true—tell me the worst there is to tell. Shall I never have my voice again? is it gone, gone?"

"We must not ask such searching questions," said the doctor, with a smile. "We don't know anything about *never* in our profession. We know to-day, and perhaps to-morrow—something about them—but no more."

He tried to smile, feeling her gaze upon him, and made light of her question. But Lottie was not to be evaded. All the little colour there was ebbed out of her face.

"Shall I never sing again?" she said. "No—that is not what I mean; shall I never be able to sing as I did once? Is it over? Oh, Doctor, tell me the truth, is that over too?"

They were all surrounding him with anxious faces. The doctor got up hurriedly and told them he had an appointment. "Do not try to sing," he said, "my dear," patting her on the shoulder. "It will be better for you, for a long time, if you do not even try;" and before anyone could speak again he had escaped, and was hurrying away.

When he was gone, Lottie sat still, half stupefied, yet quivering with pain and the horror of a new discovery. She could not speak at first. She looked round upon them with trembling lips, and great tears in her eyes. Then all at once she slid down upon her knees at Mrs. Temple's feet.

"Now all is gone," she said, "all is gone—not even *that* is left. Take me for your servant instead of the one that is going away. I can work—I am not afraid to work. I know all the work of a house. Let me be your servant instead of the one who is going away."

"Oh, Lottie, hush, hush! are you not my child?" said Mrs. Temple, with a great outcry of weeping,

clasping her shoulders and drawing the upturned face to her breast. But Lottie insisted gently and kept her position. In this thing at least she was not to be balked.

"Your servant," she said, "instead of the one that is going away. I am an honest girl, though they all cast me off. I cannot sing but I can work—your servant, or else I cannot be your child."

## CHAPTER XLV.

### CONCLUSION.

If this history had proposed to settle and bring to a dramatic conclusion even one single human life, the writer would falter here, feeling her task all unfulfilled; for what have we been able to do more than to bring our poor Lottie at the end of all things to a kind of dead-lock of all the possibilities of life? Such stoppages in the course of human affairs are, however, at least as common as a distinct climax or catastrophe. For one girl or boy whose life lies all fair before them after the first effort, how many are there who have to leave the chapter incomplete, and, turning their backs upon it, to try a second beginning, perhaps with less satisfaction, and certainly with a somewhat disturbed and broken hope! Lottie Despard had arrived at this point. Her love had not ended as happy loves end. It had been cut short by a cruel hand; her fabric of happiness had fallen to the ground; her visionary shelter, the house of her dreams, had crumbled about her, leaving nothing but bare walls and broken rafters. Her misery and dismay, the consternation of her young soul when, instead of that fair and pleasant future

which was to be her resting-place, she found around her a miserable ruin, we have scarcely attempted to say. What words can tell such a convulsion and rending of earth and sky? She had believed in her lover, and in her love as something above the weakness of ordinary humanity. She had believed herself at last to have found in him the ideal after which she had sighed all her life. His generous ardour to help her whenever he found her in want of help, the enthusiasm of a love which she believed had been given at first sight, like the love the poets tell of, had filled Lottie's heart with all the sweetness of a perfect faith. Impossible to say how she had trusted in him, with what pure and perfect delight and approbation her soul had given itself up to him, glad beyond all expression not only to find him hers, but to have found him at all, the one man known to her for whom no excuse had to be made. The discovery that he was a traitor killed her morally—at least it seemed so to the poor girl when, all crushed and bleeding from a hundred wounds, she was taken to the house of her friends. But even that was scarcely a more horrible blow than the stroke administered delicately by Augusta while still the injured soul had not staunched its own bleeding or recovered from the first mortal overthrow. The earth that had been so solid opened round her in yawning mouths of hell, leaving no ground to stand upon. There was nothing that was not changed. She

had not only lost her future, which was all happiness, and in which she had believed like a child; but she had lost her past. She had been deceived; or, worse still, she had deceived herself, seeking her own overthrow. The knowledge that it had not been love that brought Rollo under her window first, that it was altogether another sentiment, *business*, regard for his own interests—seemed to throw upon herself the blame of all that came after. Soul and heart, the girl writhed under the consciousness of having thus anticipated and brought on her fate. So vain, so foolish, so easily deceived, who was in fault but herself? Those thoughts gave her a false strength, or feverish impassioned power for a time. It was her own doing. She had been the deceiver of herself.

But who could deliver her from the dying pangs of love in her heart, those longings which are unquenchable, those protestations of nature against loss, those visions of excuses that might still be made, and suggestions of impossible explanation which in her mind she knew to be impossible even while her fancy framed them? Sometimes Lottie would find herself dreaming unawares that someone else, not Rollo, had written that cruel letter; that it was not by his will he had left her to bear the brunt of her disappointment under the elm-tree; that *it* was a forgery, and he detained by some act of cruel treachery and deceit. Sometimes a flood of passionate longing and yearning would sweep

over her—a longing only to see him, to hear his voice, to ask why, why he could have been so cruel. Love does not die in a moment, nor does it come to a violent end when the object is proved unworthy, as some people think. With Lottie it was a lingering and painful conclusion, full of memories, full of relentings; the ground that had been gained by days of painful self-suppression being lost by one sudden burst of remembrance, the sight of something that brought up before her one of the scenes that were past.

While this process was going on wistful looks were directed to Lottie's lonely path by more than one spectator. The household of the Signor was deeply moved by the hapless fate of the young lady for whom young Purcell sighed with unavailing faithfulness. He could not be made to see that it was unavailing, and the Signor, blinded by his partiality for his pupil, did not or would not see it; and, as was natural, Mrs. Purcell could not understand the possibility of any girl being indifferent to John's devotion. She thought Lottie's troubles would indeed be at an end, and her future happiness secured, if her eyes were but opened to his excellence. So strong was this feeling in the mind of the family that the Signor himself took the matter in hand, and sallied forth with the anxious sympathy of all the household to put the case before Captain Temple, who was now recognised as Lottie's guardian. "In every country but England," the Signor

said, "the friends arrange such matters. Surely it is much more judicious than the other way. There is some guarantee at least that it is not mere youthful folly. Now here is a young lady who is in very unfortunate circumstances, who has been obliged to leave her father's house——"

"I beg your pardon, Signor," said the Captain, trying hard to keep his temper, "but I do not think my house is a very bad exchange for Captain Despard's."

"Nobody who knows Captain Temple can have any doubt of that," the Signor said with a wave of his hand, "but what can her situation be in your house? You are not her relation. She has no claim, she has no right, nothing to depend upon; and if anything were to happen to you——"

"To be sure," said Captain Temple, with profound gravity, not untinctured with offence, "there is much to be said on that point. We are mortal like every body else."

Explanations were not the Signor's strong point; he was wanting in tact everybody knew. "I am making a mess of it," he said, "as I always do. Captain Temple, you are a man of sense, you know that marriage is something more than a matter of sentiment. John Purcell is a very rising musician, there is nothing in our profession he may not hope for; he loves Miss

Despard, and he could give her a home. Will you not recommend her to consider his suit, and be favourable to him? His origin perhaps is an objection—but he is a very good fellow, and he could provide for her."

Captain Temple kept his temper; he was always very proud of this afterwards. He bowed the Signor out, then came fuming upstairs to his wife. "Young Purcell!" he cried, "the housekeeper's son! as if all that was wanted was somebody to provide for her; but when a man has that taint of foreign notions," said the old Captain gravely, "nothing will wear it out."

Mrs. Temple did not respond as her husband would have wished. Indeed this was very often the case; she had not his quick impulses nor his ready speech. She said with a sigh, "I almost think the Signor is right. I wish we could do what he says. I know a man who is very fond of her, who would be very suitable, who would be sure to make her happy. I think if I could marry her to him I would take the responsibility; but she will not see it in the same light."

"Who is it? who is it?" Captain Temple said with lively curiosity. And when Mr. Ashford's name was mentioned to him, after some protestations of incredulity, he could find nothing to say but a fretful "Do you want to be rid of Lottie?" He for his part did not want to be rid of her. She was delightful to the old man. She walked with him and sat with him,

and though she had not sufficiently recovered to talk much to him, yet she listened to him while he talked, which did almost as well. The old Chevalier was more happy than he had been since his own child married and went away from him. Why should Lottie be married and carried away from him too, for no better reason than that a man could provide for her? This indeed was the weak point in Captain Temples armour. He could not provide for his adopted daughter; but he was angry when this was suggested to him. He had got a new interest, a new pleasure in life, and he did not like the idea of dying and losing it. Why should not he live for years and keep the shelter of a father's roof over this girl, who was like his own?

As for the Minor Canon, it had only been when he took the girl home from her vigil on the Slopes that he allowed himself fully to confess the state of his feelings towards her. When he had drawn her hand within his arm and felt her light weight upon him, holding up by close clasping of his own, the soft arm which he held, the floodgates had opened. He knew very well by instinct and by observation that Lottie loved, not him, but another man. He felt very sure that what had happened had little to do with her step mother but a great deal to do with her lover; and y at that very moment, the most discouraging and hop less, those gates opened and the stream flowed for and he no longer attempted any disguise either w

himself or with Mrs. Temple, who saw through and through him. Law, whom nobody supposed to have any discrimination, had seen through and through him long ago. Law felt that it was not at all likely that any man would sacrifice so much money and trouble on *his* account; and indeed from the beginning of their acquaintance he had read in "old Ashford's" eye an expression of weakness of which the astute youth was very willing to take advantage. When, however, Mr. Ashford himself gained this point of making no further resistance, and attempting no further concealment, the acknowledgment to himself of the new sentiment, little hopeful as it was, had brought him a sense of happiness and freedom. Love in his heart was sweet, even though it had no return. It made life other than it had ever been. It opened possibilities which to the middle-aged Minor Canon had all been closed before. Handel may be a consolation or even a delight; and pupils, though neither consolatory nor delightful, at least keep a man from the sense that his life is useless; but neither of these things make up the sum of human requirements, nor do they help to reveal the *fin mot* of that mortal enigma which is more hard to solve than all the knots of philosophy. It seemed to Mr. Ashford when he gave up all resistance, and let this flood of tenderness for one creature take possession of his heart, that a sudden illumination had been given to him, a light that cleared up many difficult matters, and

made the whole world more clear. With this lantern in his hand he thought he might even go back to tread the darker ways of the world with more fortitude and calm. The miseries of the poor seemed to him more bearable, the burdens of humanity less overwhelming. Why? but he could not have told why. Perhaps because life itself was more worth having, more beautiful, more divine with love in it; a poor man, though he was starving, could not be so poor with that to keep him alive. He remembered in his early experiences, when he had fled from the horrible mystery of want and pain, to have seen that other presence which then he took no note of, in the poorest places—gleaming in the eyes of a woman, in a man's rough face, which knew no other enlightenment. This, then, was what it was. In the sweetness of the heavenly discovery perhaps he went too far, and felt in it the interpretation and compensation of all. Naturally, a man who has found a new happiness does exalt it above the dimensions of any human possession. It made the Minor Canon feel his own life too sheltered and peaceful, it made of him a man among other men. It seemed to him now that he wanted to go and help his brothers who were suffering, whose suffering had appalled him, from whom he had fled in excess of pity.

But he did not say one word of his love to Lottie except those vague words which have been recorded. What was the use? She knew it as he knew it; as

what could it matter? After the first impulse of speech, which was for her sake rather than his—to comfort her wounded pride, her sense of humiliation, if nothing else, by the knowledge that she was priceless to another if rejected by one—no desire to speak was in his mind. He surrounded her with every care he was permitted to give, with a thousand unexpressed tendernesses, with a kind of ideal worship, such as was most likely to soothe her wounds and to please her, at least, with a sense that she was beloved. In this way the winter went slowly on. Law did not sail till the early spring, being detained by the Minor Canon as he would, if he could, have detained a ray of sunshine that warmed her. And thus Lottie was surrounded by all the fairest semblances of life.

The fairest semblances! How often they collect about those who can derive no advantage from them! A good man loved her, but Lottie could not accept his love; the kindest domestic shelter was given to her, but she had no right to it—she was not the daughter of these kind people, and they would not make her their servant as she had asked them to do. Musing in her own mind over all that lay about her, this seemed the only true standing ground that she could hope for. Now that she wanted a way of living, a real occupation, her voice had failed her and she could not sing; now that she had the doors of marriage opened before *her, her heart* was too sick even to contemplate that.

possibility; now that she had a home where she was beloved, it was not her home but the house of a stranger. To all this she had no right. If they would let her be their servant, that would be true; if Mr. Ashford would see that she was not worth loving, that would be true; if she could take up the trade she had despised, in that there would be an honest refuge. All these things were out of her reach. She said nothing about the thoughts in her heart, but they burned within her; and nobody understood them, except perhaps Mr. Ashford, to whom she never confided them. Law thought her very well off indeed, and declared frankly that he would leave England with an easy mind: "You are one that will always fall on your feet," he said, with perfect satisfaction. Captain Despard even, who had at first resented the new arrangement of affairs, came at last in his finest manner and made very pretty speeches to Captain Temple and his wife. "If, as I understand, my daughter's society is a real pleasure to you," he said, "I am always glad when I or mine can be of use to my neighbours, and certainly, my dear Madam, she shall stay. Indeed, in the present state of my domestic circumstances," he added, with a wave of his hand, not perceiving Captain Temple's angry eagerness to speak, which his wife subdued with a supplicating gesture, "I will not conceal from you that it is an ease to my mind to know that Lettie is among the friends of her own choice. My

wife and she," Captain Despard said, with a little shrug of his shoulders—"we all know what ladies are, and that occasionally unpleasantnesses will occur—my wife and she have not got on together." Thus Lottie was left by those who belonged to her. And when she retired to the room that was her own in the new home—which was so like the little room in the old, but so much more dainty, with everything in it that the old people could think of to make her comfortable, and all the little decorations which a mother invents for her child, Lottie would stand in the midst of these evidences of love and kindness, and ask herself what she could do—she had never been so well off in her life, what could she do? She had "no claim" upon the Temples, as the Signor said, "no right" to their kindness. The Captain's niece, who lived in St. Michael's, looked at the interloper, as the nearest relative of a foolish old couple who were wasting their means upon a stranger might be excused for looking. What was she doing but living on their charity? What could she do? Oh, that she had now the voice which she had cared so little for when she had it! How strange, how strange it all seemed to her now! She had, she said to herself, a trade, an honest trade in her hands, and she had not cared for it, had struggled against its exercise, had not wished to qualify herself for its use; and now it was lost to her. This was the only thing that was Lottie's fault; the other strange

paradoxes about her had come without any doing of hers. But the result of all was that, with love and kindness on every side, she had no place that belonged to her, no right to anything. After the kind people who were so good to her had gone to their rest, the girl would sit and think over this problem. What was she to do? To be obliged to think of this did her good; it took her mind away from the wounds of her heart, it brought in new objects—new thoughts. She could not dwell for ever, as a disengaged mind might have done, amid the ruined temples and palaces of her love; she could not sink to the ground, and conclude, as in happier circumstances a broken-hearted girl might have been tempted to do, that all was over. On the contrary, life not being over, nor any end procurable by means of hers, an entire world of new difficulties and troubles was brought in which Lottie had to meet, and, as she might, find a solution for.

On the day before Law's departure, which had been so often delayed, she went back to her father's house, under her brother's guardianship, to take away the few little possessions which remained there. Law had been a very faithful guardian of Lottie's little belongings. There was nothing that Polly would have liked better than to enter and rummage through her step-daughter's things, searching for secrets through all the little drawers and boxes which Lottie had taken a girlish pleasure in keeping in good order. But Law

had stood up like a dragon for his sister's property; and Captain Despard, who sometimes put himself on Lottie's side, by a certain *esprit de famille* against the wife, who, after all, was an alien and not one of them, supported Law. Thus the men of her family, though they had not hesitated to treat her carelessly and even harshly themselves, yet made a certain stand against the interference of any other. It was a day in early April when Lottie reluctantly went into her father's house on this errand. Polly was out; the house was vacant and quiet as when it had been her own, and it is not to be described with what a yearning the girl looked at the shabby furniture, the old piano, the faded rooms in which she had spent many a troubled and many a dull day, and beat her wings against the bars of her cage, and wished for a hundred things which were never to be hers. The reader knows how far Lottie had been from being happy: but yet she thought she had been happy, and that nothing better could have been desired than to be the household Providence, and "take care," as she called it, of her father and brother. All that was over. She could not bear to go into the little drawing-room, where *he* had visited her, where she had lived in such a world of dreams. Her heart beat as she went up the old stairs. She was far better off with the Temples, who could not pet or serve her enough; yet with what a yearning she came into the house which had once been hers,

but in which now there was no place for her! In her own room, thanks to Law's care, she found everything as she had left it; and it is not to be told what anguish filled Lottie's breast as she looked at her little white dress, all carefully prepared for the event which was never to happen, and the little box with the bonnet which she had made in such sweet agitation and tumult of heart. And there was the pearl locket upon its white ribbon, her sole ornament. She gathered these things together and carried them, not letting even Law touch them, to her new home. She could not speak as she went up and shut herself in her room. A little fire was burning there, a luxury unknown to Lottie in the days when she was her own mistress, and no one cared how chilly she might be. Then with old Lear's "climbing sorrow" in her throat, she undid the little bit of maidenly finery for which she had so much wanted a sprig of orange blossom. It was a nothing, a little knot of tulle and ribbon—a piece of vanity not worthy a thought; so any moralist would have said who had seen Lottie stand speechless, tearless, a great sob in her throat, with the poor little bonnet in her hand. A bonnet, there is nothing tragic in that. She put it upon her fire and watched the light stuff flame and fall into sudden ashes. It was the affair of a moment; but those hopes, those prospects of which it had been the token, her life itself, with all that was beautiful in it, seemed ended too.

Then she sat down for the hundredth time and confronted the waste of darkness that was her life. What was she to do? Perhaps it was the final ending of her dream, symbolised by the destruction of that bit of tulle and ribbon, which moved her. For the first time her dreamy self-questions took a different tone. She asked herself, not what am I to do? but something more definite. Law was going away the next day, the only being except her father to whom she had any right, on whom she had any claim—going away in comfort, in high hope, as much as she could have desired for him. By whose doing? She had given up the care of Law, selfishly absorbed in her own hopes; and who was it who had taken her place and done the thing which Lottie had only wished and longed to do? She seemed to see him standing before her, with tenderness beyond words in his eyes. Always her good angel: how often he had interposed to help her!—from that early time at the Deanery when she had sung false in her agitation, and he had covered the error and beguiled her into the divine song which at that very moment she could hear thrilling all the air, pealing from the Abbey. Was it because this happened to be the afternoon anthem that she thought of that simple beginning of the Minor Canon's benefits? Never since had he failed her; though of all the people upon whom Lottie had no *claim, he it* was on whom she had the least claim

He had saved Law from his aimless idleness, and it was he who had awakened herself out of the miserable dream that had almost cost her her life. How could she repay him for all he had done for her? In one way, one only way. She shuddered, then stilled herself, and faced the thought with all the courage she had left. Marry him! If he would have her, if he wanted her, why should not she marry him? She trembled as the words came into her mind. It was not she that said them; something seemed to say them in her mind, without any will of hers. So good a man, so kind. Did it matter so much whether she liked it, whether she did not like it, so long as it pleased him? Perhaps this was not the right way in which such a calculation ought to be made, but Lottie did not think of that. At all times it had been easier for her to think of others than of herself. Only once had she pleased herself, and no good had come of it. Her heart began to beat with a heroic impulse. She was not worth his having, she whom everyone had cast off; but if he thought so? She shuddered, yet her heart rose high in her bosom. She would do her best, she would be a good wife, that would be within her power. She would serve him humbly, that he might forgive her for not loving him. She rose up to her feet unconsciously as this great resolution came upon her mind.

"Lottie," said Law at her door, "the service is

over, and the Signor is practising. Come over to the Abbey with me. I'd like to wander about the old place a little the last night I am here. Come, it'll be something to think of," said Law, more moved than he liked to show, "when we're thousands of miles separate over the sea."

Lottie did not wait to be asked again. She hurried to him, glad to be thus delivered from the thoughts that were getting too much for her. Long, long months had passed since the brother and sister had gone to church together, their close vicinity to the Abbey and its frequent services had broken up the old childish Sunday habits. And it was not going to church in the ordinary way, but only roaming through to the silent beautiful place all deserted, with the organ pealing through its silence. Law's heart was touched, though he was too successful and prosperous now to be easily moved. He strayed about the majestic stillness of the nave with tears in his eyes, thinking—this time to morrow! This time to-morrow he would probably be prosaically ill or prosaically comfortable, and thinking little of what he left. But for the moment it seemed to Law that when he once was gone, his heart would turn like that of any poet, to the sweet friends to whom that day he had said farewell.

The Abbey was altogether still except for the music. No one was about; the last ray of the westerly sun had got in among the canopy work over the stalls,

and tangled itself there. Underneath the shadows of the evening were creeping dimly, and through the great vault the organ pealed. What bursts of wonderful sound, what glories in the highest, what quiverings of praise unspeakable! Lottie raised her face unawares to the gallery from which that music came. How her life had gone along with it, shaping itself to that high accompaniment! It had run through everything, delight and misery alike, good and evil. Her heart was moved already, and trembling under the touch of new impulses, resolutions, emotions. She stood still unawares, with her face turned that way, a new light coming upon it; once more the music got into her soul. With her head raised, her arms falling by her side, her heart going upwards in an ecstasy of sudden feeling, she stood spell-bound. She did not hear—how should she?—a whisper in the organ-loft, a noiseless change of music, nor see the anxious faces looking out upon her from among the fretwork of the carved screen. The torrent of sound changed; it breathed into a celestial softness of sorrow and hope; tears dropped liquid like a falling of rain; a counter stream of melody burst forth. Lottie did not know what she was doing, the spell upon her was broken. "I know that my Redeemer liveth:" she lifted up her voice and sang.

In the organ loft there was a group which clustered together, scarcely venturing to breathe. The Signor

was the one who had most command of himself. "I always knew it would come back," he said in sharp staccato syllables, as he played on. Young Purcell, who loved her, sat down in the shadow and laughed and cried, blubbering not with dignity. The Minor Canon, who did not once take his eyes from her, waiting the moment that she might falter or want succour, watched, looking over the carved rail with face lighted up like her own.

Thus was Lottie restored to Art; was it to Love too?

THE END.

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